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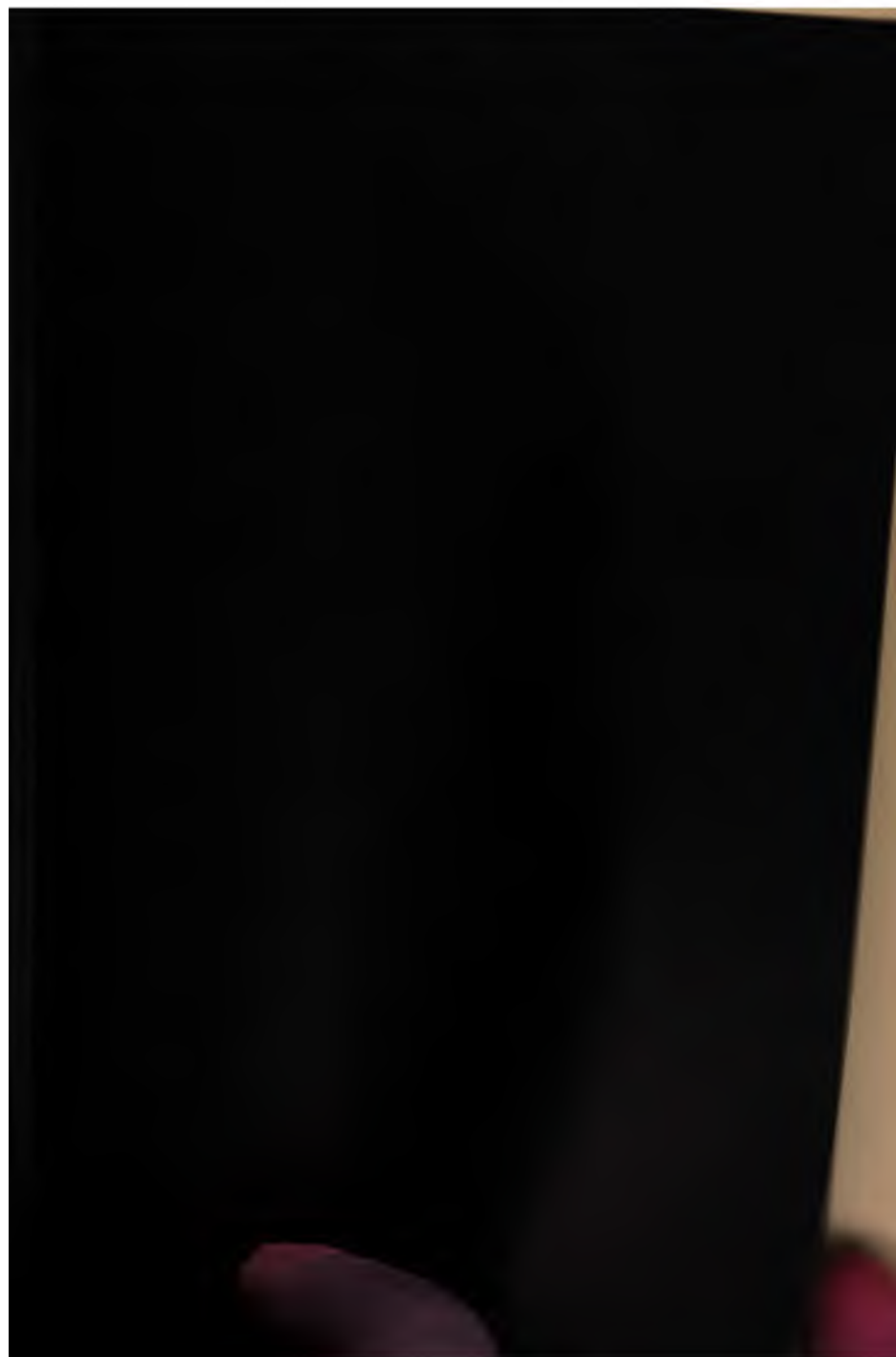
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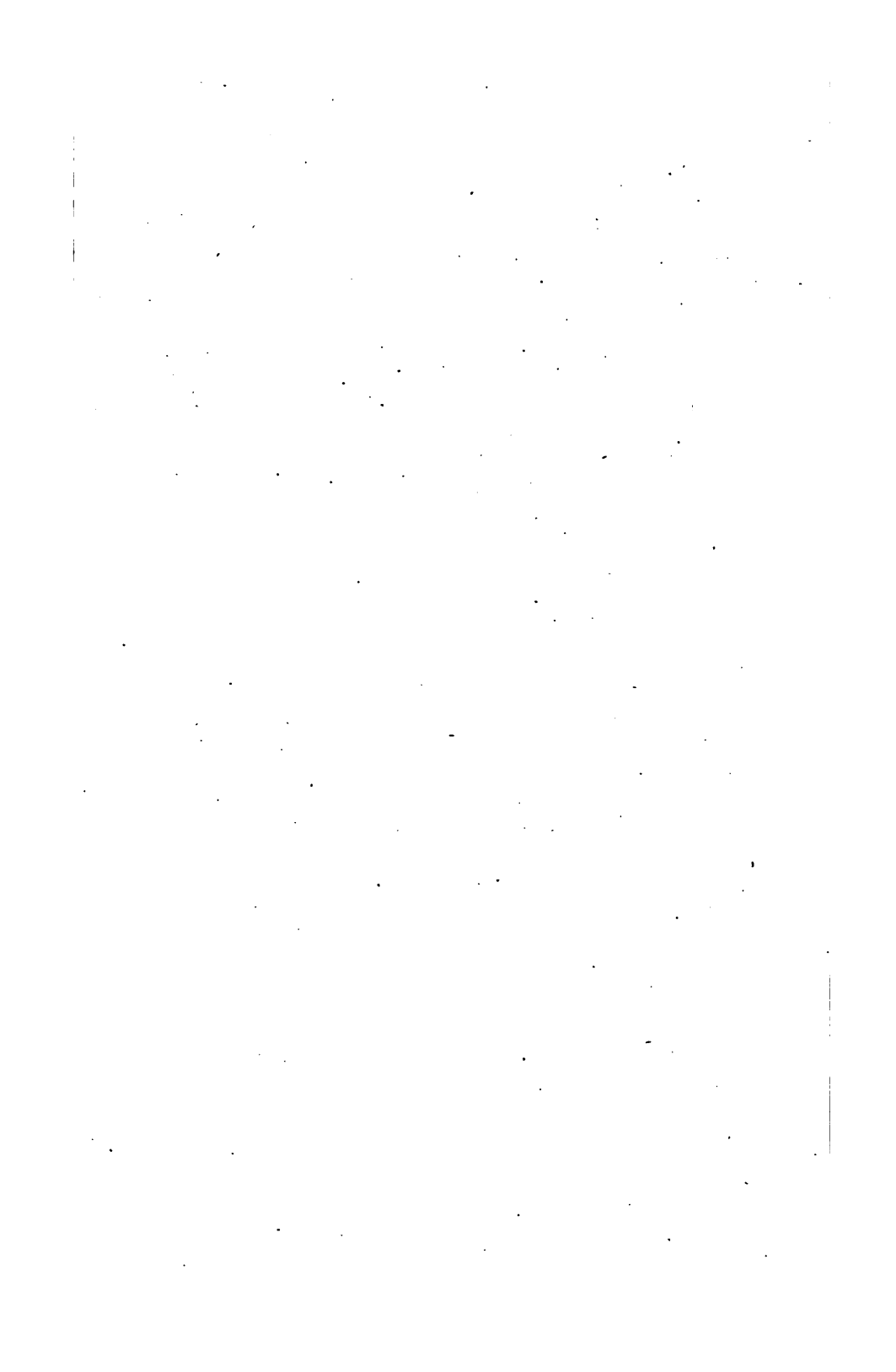
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BY

R. E. FRANCILLON

IN THREE VOLUMES

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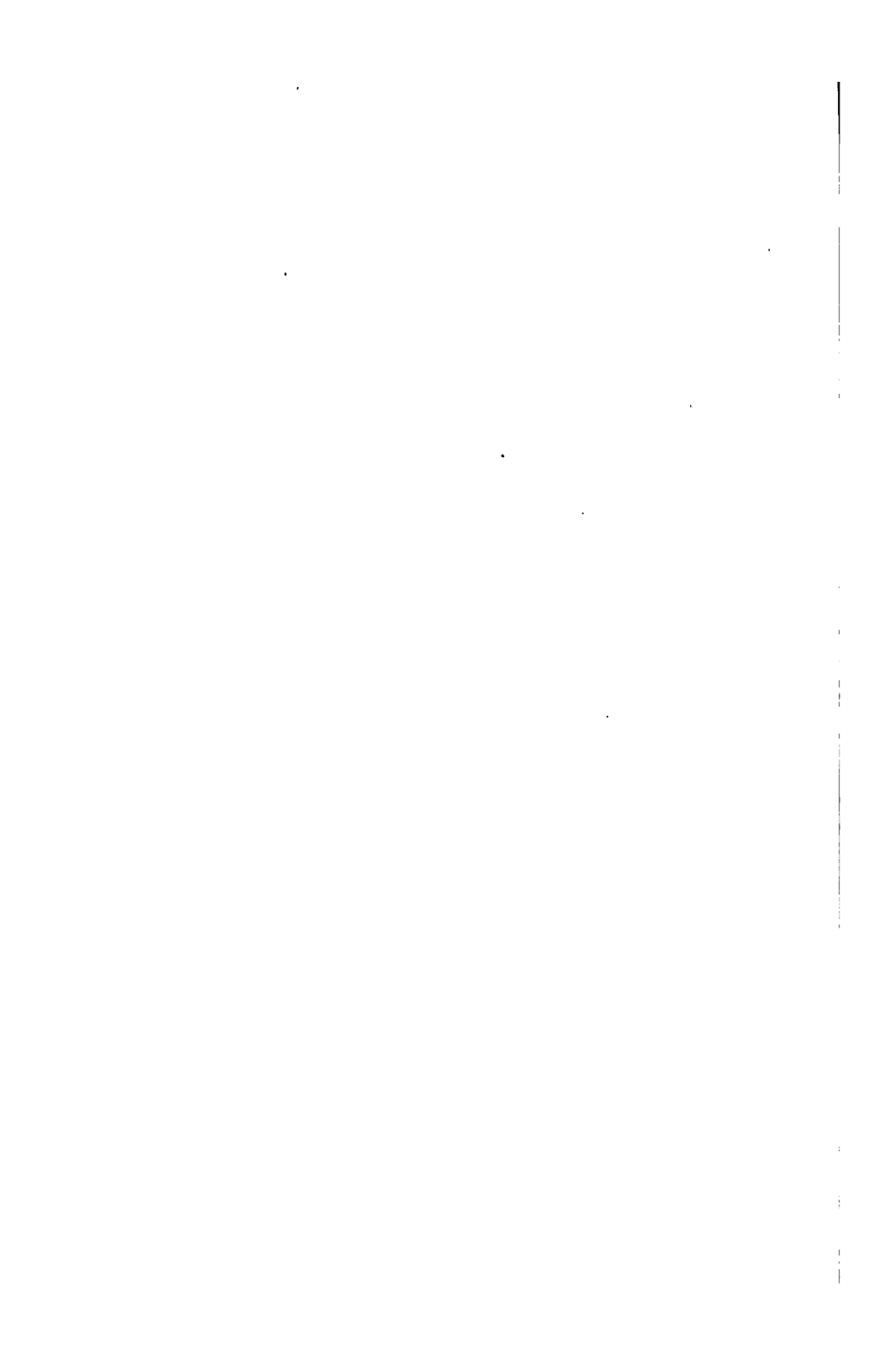


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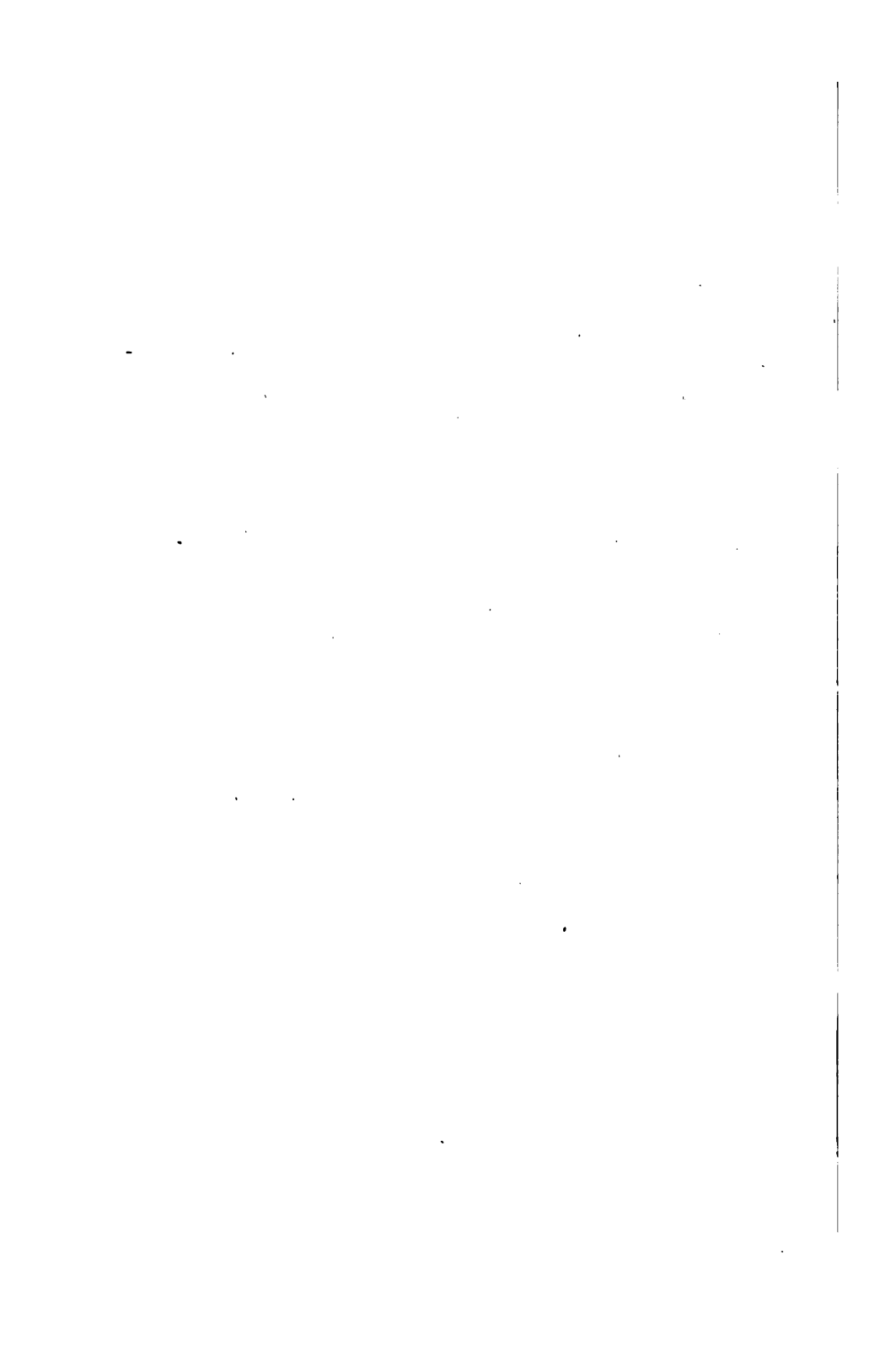
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PROLOGUE



PROLOGUE.

FIRST PART—IN FRANCE.

CONTAINING THE EVENTS OF ONE NIGHT.

I.

THERE is no better rule than that every book, of whatever kind it may be, from a treatise on metaphysics up to a fairy tale, should begin with a sentence or two to explain its motive, so that the intending reader may not be cheated into wasting his time, supposing the motive to be obviously worthless, in having to find out the worthlessness of it for himself: and not only so, but that the author himself may be kept from straying out of the straight road without good and sufficient reason—a fault to which romancers are almost as prone as philosophers themselves. In accordance, then, with this most excel-

lent principle, let it be clearly understood that the motive of this story is, so far as it professes to have any motive at all, the Power of Circumstance—that demon of demons which, whether for good or ill, the will of man may, indeed, call into life, but can seldom control and never wholly exorcise—and the way in which it entered into conflict with the wills, impulses, and characters of certain men and women who lived not very many years since, and of whom at least one or two were born not too long ago to be living still.

Before setting out, however, it is advisable, by way of introduction, to give some account of some occurrences that form an advanced-guard, so to speak, to the main body of the story: and it is only right to say this at once, in order to take the opportunity of warning the reader against thinking that the remainder of his journey will lead him among exceptional characters or exceptional scenes. Of the characters upon whose thoughts, feelings, and actions the plot of this story depends, there is not one that may not, in one form or another, fall within the range of a very limited experience. All will be seen striving to attain very much the same object, and, considering their dissimilarities of nature, in very much the same way: nor will either the object or the way be of an essentially un-

common kind. Not one member of the company will be found altogether bad or good, strong or weak : not one will have any pre-eminent claim to the title of hero or heroine, even in the technical sense of the words. Certainly not one will prove to be perfectly consistent—who, indeed, out of the world of fiction, ever does?—so that even the best will be best only by comparison, and the worst will not be without plenty of excuse. If, therefore, the intending reader is unable to interest himself in men and women as they are or may be in the face of many faults and many weaknesses—if he demands exciting events and abnormal psychology—he must not complain that he has not been fairly warned when he finds himself disappointed : and, once more, he must not take what he finds in this introduction for an example of what he will find in the story itself.

It was, then, in the month of Nivose in the year I of Liberty, and in the territory of the Republic, one and indivisible, that a certain circumstance took place which may fairly be taken as the beginning of an important chapter in the history of Earl's Dene—a history which itself belongs to a later time, and, as the title of it denotes, to another and nearer land.

Those who are versed in the revolutionary calendar will remember that, in the month and year just

named, what is called the Reign of Terror was at its height. Eighty persons a-day were being guillotined at Paris: sixty were every day being shot, drowned, or guillotined at Lyons: sixty at Bordeaux: sixty at Marseilles: two hundred at Nantes: two hundred at Toulon. The King and Queen had already been followed up the steps of the scaffold by the best and by the worst of their judges. Massacre was running riot in La Vendée, while the fields and forests of the Vosges, of the Jura, and of the Gironde were swarming with miserable fugitives of all ranks and of all political creeds; for it was no longer nobles and royalists alone who had special need for fear. In a word, it was just then that it seemed as though, throughout the whole land of France, there was no spot in which even a child might live in safety for a single day.

And yet there was at least one such spot, though it was hard to find. It was the village of Saint-Félix-des-Rochers, in the department of Doubs.

Saint-Félix-des-Rochers was small, obscure, not populous, and out of any beaten track. Yet it was not its obscurity that rendered it secure, for at that time seclusion by no means meant security. Nor was it its politics, even though Saint Félix, like the greater part of the district in which it lay, was re-

publican to the backbone: for the guillotine had come to be even fonder of republican than of royalist necks. It was not that its inhabitants were so few: for, alas! it is among a crowd of strangers that safety is found, rather than among a small circle of friends and neighbours. It was simply that there was not just then an able-bodied man in the place save the Curé, who would not willingly have harmed a fly, and whom the women still worshipped, in spite of his never having, like their husbands and brothers, changed his opinions with the times: and that, at least in the winter time, no one in his senses ever dreamed of ever visiting the place except under compulsion, while no stranger ever had business that could possibly compel him to visit it at any season of the year. Nature, also, who always does her best to defend her children, had covered it with a friendly mantle of cold and snow, that had made the approaches to it difficult and dangerous. So much for the general causes of its security. But why this sanctuary of nature had been abandoned by the quiet race of herdsmen and wood-carvers, who had the best right to its protection, requires some explanation.

The lord of Saint Félix, while places still had lords, had been the Marquis de Croisville, or Créville as he was called by his vassals, to whom, however,

he was little more than a myth, or a mere abstraction, of which his intendant was the not very agreeable embodiment. Before the year 1788, all that the present generation of the Saint-Féliciens had known of the present bearer of the title was that he was a young man of about thirty years old, that he was much about the court, and that he had married a wife who was a stranger to the country. The Curé knew a little more, however. About a year before the meeting of the States-General, the good father had, for the first and only time in his life, paid a visit to Paris: and he naturally made some inquiries as to what kind of person was the Marquis de Croisville. What he heard was not likely to please a parish priest of the old school. He heard the lord of Saint Félix spoken of as a *bel esprit*, as no little of a *roué*, and, altogether, as a man of the time—as a “philosopher,” and as an enthusiast about the rights of man. But when, after much hesitation, he summoned up courage to call upon one whom his principles as well as his respect for the lord of the soil caused him to fear, he was no less charmed than surprised. He obtained an interview in order to request certain indulgences for his poor and struggling flock: and not only was he himself treated with the utmost courtesy and kindness, but he was enabled to carry

back to Saint Félix, together with a most glowing account of its master, such a harvest of material benefits, that love and reverence for the name of De Croisville became at once an active principle of faith in the place. The fact was, that it suited the Marquis just then, as a man of the time and professed philosopher, to show an unusual amount of generosity to a set of people about whom, in reality, he did not care a straw, although they did happen to be his own. Consideration for the people was, though a little late in the day, in fashion at court just then, and no doubt his acts of munificence to his poor villagers somehow or other came to the ears of the King or Queen. But of course the Curé and his flock were able to look no farther than the deed.

Henceforth the existence of the Marquis seemed to be much more of an actual fact to his people. They began to take an interest in everything that concerned him, and eagerly opened their ears to catch up every floating rumour with which his name chanced to be mingled. Nor was their feeling towards him of the nature of that gratitude which has been defined as a lively sense of favours to come. It partook of that, doubtless: but when those who have all their lives been obliged to look for favours to God alone find that they are not forgotten by man after all,

their feeling to their first human benefactor is something far more than one of ordinary gratitude. And rumours did come even to Saint Félix sometimes. To what part of France, indeed, did they not come during those next two years? First they heard of the Marquis as one of the most zealous defenders of the rights of the people even against his own order: and then all Saint Félix became Girondist to a man, with the solitary exception of the Curé, who still held by the old paths: so that, as the latter was as much beloved by his flock as a good and simple-hearted priest can be, the sympathies of the place came to be made up of a curious blending of republican ideas with the most childlike religious faith. The Curé must be right, and the Seigneur could not be wrong; and so the parish made a compromise with itself. This, however illogical, was not difficult, for, in truth, the Girondism of the place was as much a matter of the heart, and as little a matter of the head, as its Catholicism. Then, not long afterwards, when the day of Mirabeau was over, the peasants heard of their lord as a friend of Vergniaud, and as one who had, of his own accord, thrown off the last vestiges of his rank: and then they became almost Jacobin, but, nevertheless, never gave up speaking of him as "the Marquis." Next they heard of him as

voting for the death of the King: and still, though a shudder thrilled through the place, and though the Curé was bold enough openly to speak out his abhorrence of the murder of the son of Saint Louis, no one was a whit the less loyal to the name of the Marquis de Croisville. After that they heard of him no more, until one day sudden tidings reached them that he was not far from Pontarlier, in arms for the Gironde. The next day, not a man who could fight, save the Curé, was left in Saint Félix.

Though the place has been spoken of as a village, it in reality consisted, not of houses and cottages more or less closely packed together, but of some half-dozen outlying *châlets*, of which the church was the centre rather metaphorically than in fact. There was a chateau also, but it was in ruins, and had not been inhabited except by bats and owls since the days of Charles *le hardi*. It was in one of these *châlets*, which bore the not very appropriate name of Pré-aux-Fleurs, that Father Laurent was sitting, on this night of Nivose, in company with the old wife and with a young woman, who might have been one of her daughters. Of the appearance of the two latter, nothing need be said: let it suffice that they were hard-working peasants in appearance as well as in reality. Of the priest himself may be said almost

as little. He was an elderly healthy-looking man, with a red weather-beaten face, of which the expression was that which belongs to a heart at peace with itself and all the world. That he could keep such an expression in those terrible days was in itself sufficient to vouch for the exceptional security of Saint-Félix-des-Rochers. The room in which these three were sitting was large, and, though barely and roughly furnished, was rendered not uncomfortable by the presence of a blazing wood-fire, before which a large dog was basking in that delightful state of agony in which his kind revels when the fire is too hot and the night is too cold.

"No, you cannot think of getting home to-night, father," said the old woman, who had gone to the window that she might look out into the still, cold air.

"You must not think of it, father," echoed the younger.

The priest drew closer over the fragrant wood-fire.

"But Dame Margot will be uneasy," he said, in the tone of one who thinks it his duty to protest against doing what he fully means to do.

"Dame Margot will never expect you," replied the old woman. "There will be a snow-fall, and the wind is rising."

"In that case I suppose I must run the risk of giving Dame Margot a fright, then. Better that, perhaps, than to run the risk of giving her cause for it. I wish I could feel sure that your Pierre had as good quarters as these."

"And Monsieur le Marquis."

"And Monsieur le Marquis. Ah! these are terrible days—terrible days, aunt Cathon. The world is gone mad, I fear."

"Ah! my father, you and I remember different times indeed."

"To have killed the King himself! No wonder God punishes this land! And I cannot help fearing, aunt Cathon, that we too shall have to suffer for that sin of our Seigneur."

"Doubtless, my father, He will protect His own."

"No doubt, aunt Cathon. We must put our trust in Him. How is the night now?"

"The snow is beginning. It is quite dark."

"Then I must stay, I suppose."

"Indeed you must, my father. The road will be lost."

"I wish I could send word to Dame Margot, though."

"But if she guesses where you are?"

"Well, I daresay she will. *Dieu!* now I think

of it, this was the very day in the year I first saw the Seigneur, just five years since. How times have changed!"

"You are fortunate, my father, to have seen Monsieur le Marquis with your own eyes."

"No," continued the priest, as if speaking to himself—"no, I cannot think how a man like him should have been mixed up with such a sin—so noble, so generous as he seemed. I cannot think he could have had a disloyal heart."

"Surely not, my father."

"And his young wife, too, poor girl! I trust she has come to no harm."

"She should have come to Saint Félix, my father."

"Ay!—but I saw her too; and she did not look to be one who would fly to the hills while men remained in the field."

"Who knows? perhaps they will both come among us."

"Yes: we are safe from the bloodhounds here, thank God!"

"I will pray our blessed patron to put it into their hearts."

"I fear it is too late, aunt Cathon. And then I fear, too, for our own people."

"They will be faithful to Monsieur le Marquis, my father."

"Ah! it is not that, aunt Cathon. I feel like a shepherd whose flock has blindly run to give battle to a herd of wolves."

"God will protect His own."

"If they were truly on His side—yes! If they were gone to fight for Him!"

"But when they have gone to fight for Monsieur le Marquis, my father?"

"There is a higher loyalty, aunt Cathon."

"What! than to fight for Monsieur le Marquis, who has been so good to us all?"

"Alas! I fear they know not what they do. When wolves fight with wolves it is no time for the sheep to leave their fold."

"But Monsieur le Marquis!" replied aunt Cathon. The words seemed to express her whole idea of right and loyalty. The Curé sighed, and was silent. He was not quite sure of his ground, and he felt that his last metaphor would not quite hold water.

"It is snowing fast," said the girl, after a pause. She had relieved her mother at the window.

"Truly our hills are a fortress to us," said the priest. "Who knows? perhaps at this moment our people are thanking God for this snow."

"Ah! snow or not, trust my Pierre for knowing his way among the hills."

"Yes indeed!" said her daughter, proudly.

"May it be so," said the priest. "At least I may pray for their safety, if for nothing more."

"And for that of Monsieur le Marquis."

"Ah! aunt Cathon, it is fearfully hard to know what to think in these days. But doubtless, as you say, God will protect His own."

As aunt Cathon took all that her priest said for gospel, she was a good deal puzzled by the subtle distinction between fighting for the right and fighting for Monsieur le Marquis, which, according to what he had said, it seemed to be her duty to draw. Nor was the Curé himself by any means clear upon the matter. He could not deny to himself the principle of loyalty to the Seigneur. It would have been all plain enough had he felt sure that the Seigneur was on the right side: but the conflict of allegiance puzzled him terribly.

And now, having thus made the acquaintance of one who will play an important, though apparently obscure, part in this history—for its real importance is not diminished by the fact that the name of the Curé of Saint Félix will henceforth occur barely more than once again—it is time to leave the warm room and its fragrant blaze, and to turn out into the night, in order to become acquainted with certain persons whose parts, if not more really important, will be far less obscure.

II.

During this conversation, and after it, a springless cart, drawn by a couple of rough-looking mules, was slowly travelling along a road which is remotely connected with the highway between Besançon and Lons-le-Saulnier.

The weather in that region of high hills, of which the loftiest point is Mount Jura, and on that night of January—or rather of Nivose, for the old two-faced god was far too unreasonable a being to be recognised by those who had worshipped the very goddess of Reason in person—was bitterly cold: too cold, indeed, for the heavy snow-clouds, from which large flakes were descending slowly, to come down bodily. If they had, the road would have been rendered simply impassable. The cart, which was of the rudest sort, was only dragged on by the mules with the greatest difficulty—a difficulty which was certainly not diminished by the fact that the direction in which it was going lay up hill. The mules themselves were led by a peasant of the country, more rough-looking even than they, who walked by their side, and occupied himself with talking to

them from time to time in some unknown tongue, and with looking about him at the thick grey clouds that hung everywhere around. Whatever might have been his appearance under ordinary circumstances, at present he certainly looked unpleasantly formidable. He carried a long knife without a sheath stuck through a sash which might or might not once have been of the orthodox tricolor: in spite of the cold his feet were bare: his clothes were ragged, and of no particular description, so much had they lost all pretence to form: and, instead of a cap, he wore a linen bandage wrapped tightly over his forehead and completely covering one eye. Had the scene been in the Pyrenees instead of the Jura, he would have been taken for a *contrabandista* bearing off his cargo of salt or tobacco from a hardly-won battle with the *douane*. What the cart really contained could only be guessed at from an occasional movement among the cloaks and wrappings with which it seemed filled, and from an occasional moan of pain, as if some woman lay there whom the cold and the jolting of the clumsy conveyance caused to suffer terribly.

The scenery of the Jura on the western side, though often beautiful, seldom affords anything like the grandeur that belongs to its eastern face. But

winter aggrandises all things : and now this pass which the travellers were ascending had become not only grand but even terrible. In summer, no doubt, like a hundred other passes of the kind that run along the border of the Franche Comté, it led between hills covered from base to summit with green turf and waving woods, of which the monotony was only occasionally broken by some sudden mass of dark grey rock, beneath which the river leapt and sparkled like a mere silver thread. But in the depth of winter the whole scene is transformed, so that instead of being green and grey the hills were now white with limitless snow and black with leafless trees : while under the massive sky the river no longer leaped and sparkled, but, fed by countless torrents, gloomily rushed along with a dull, ceaseless roar. He would be a bold man, even though well versed in the country, who should seek to guide himself or another through the hopeless sameness of those round, dome-shaped hills, undistinguished from one another by any of the sharp and varied outlines that among the Alps make every peak a landmark. Only one summit in the whole landscape stood for a sign, which, unlike the rest, was high enough to stand bald and bare out of the forest : and this in the darkness only looked like a vast cupola of cloud.

The road itself, besides those caused by the snow, was not without other and more serious dangers—for it hung high above the river: and although the descent could not properly be called precipitous, still it was quite far and steep enough to make a fall fatal, in one way or another.

The travellers proceeded for a long time without a word, unless one could call words the sounds addressed to the mules by their guide. At last, however, a man's voice cried out from the cart—

“Pierre!”

“Monseigneur?” answered the leader of the mules, turning his head.

“Do not call me ‘Monseigneur’! How far are we from Les Vacheries?”

“Six miles,” and he stirred up the mules, who had taken advantage of this slight conversation to slacken their pace.

And now the hills grew darker, and the sky seemed to descend lower and lower until the great dome that lay to southward was completely absorbed in the mass of clouds. As for the course of the river, it had grown as black as if it were that of Styx or Acheron.

“Pierre!” again called out the voice from the cart.

"Monseigneur?"

"How often am I to tell you not to call me 'Monseigneur'? How long will it be before we reach Les Vacheries?"

The guide shrugged his shoulders; but the gesture, though significant, was not seen by Monseigneur, who repeated his question.

"In less than three hours—if we get there to-night at all."

"But we *must* get there to-night."

"As Monseigneur pleases." And again, after a long look at the sky behind him, he urged on the mules, who, considering the circumstances, certainly did their best. Probably they too wished to pass the night at Les Vacheries.

The flakes of snow, which had hitherto been fluttering through the air languidly and undecidedly, now began to increase both in size, in number, and in speed. They seemed to have been seized with a sudden purpose.

"Pierre!"

"Monseigneur?"

"Stop this horrible jolting. I am afraid Madame is very ill."

The mules were brought to, with what would have been a jerk had it not been for the slipperiness of

the road, which nearly brought the leader to the ground, sure-footed as he was.

"Tell me, Pierre—when shall we really get to Les Vacheries? Are we certain to get there?"

The other no longer answered "as Monseigneur pleases." "If it please God," he said instead.

"Cannot we get on faster, at any rate?"

"Impossible, Monsieur le Marquis."

After some little difficulty, the heap of cloaks and straw was partially thrust aside, and a man emerged from the cart and stood by the side of Pierre. His costume was but little, if at all, better than that of his guide; but, even so, the distinction of his appearance was in keeping with what his voice had promised. He was as obviously a gentleman as Pierre was a peasant.

"Pierre," he said, in a low voice, "unless we can find help, Madame will die. The cold, the fatigue, are too much for her strength, and she is in terrible pain, besides. You know this country—is there no house, no *châlet*, nearer than Les Vacheries? No cottage——"

"None that Madame could reach. Les Vacheries is the nearest, by the road."

A cry came from the cart—the Marquis ran to its side. "Good God!" he exclaimed, "my wife is ac-

tually dying. Let us push on, for heaven's sake! I will walk by the cart: and push on faster, in heaven's name!"

But this was by no means so easy. The snow, which had till now impeded their feet only, was now so thick as almost to blind the eyes both of mules and of men. The Marquis carefully arranged the cloaks and straw, and then stood still in despair. Pierre said something to the animals, which seemed, for a moment, to encourage them to greater exertion. They almost plunged forward: but, in a moment, came to a stand, their feet and ears thrown forward, and their bodies strained back and trembling. A low, wild moaning was heard, far more terrible in its sound than that of the swollen river.

"What is that, Pierre?" asked the Marquis, instinctively laying his hand on the pistols that he carried in his belt.

"That? That is the wolves, Monsieur le Marquis."

He shuddered. It was not many days since the wolves of the Gironde had saved Pétion from the guillotine: nor were those of the Jura, he thought, likely to be less merciful.

"Are they likely to attack us, Pierre?"

"I hope not, Monseigneur." But his tone was not hopeful.

"Will not those accursed beasts stir?"

"They must stir, Monseigneur, unless we make up our minds to wait till we have the snow for a blanket."

"Then push on once more."

Again the mules were urged into action—this time by means of something considerably stronger than mere words. But, when they once stirred, it was not their fault that the progress which they succeeded in making was so slow: for they would willingly have galloped now, if it had only been possible. As it was, however, the travellers had to creep along, the snow beating into their eyes, the cold numbing their limbs, and the howling of the wild beasts filling their ears with its wail of terror. But still, however slowly, they did make real progress. If the snow did not become so thick as to stop their passage altogether—if the wolves did not surround them—if their strength did not fail—if they did not perish with cold—they might reasonably expect to arrive at their destination in time to find shelter before it was too late. It is true that the chances were in favour of at least one of these things happening, but

none of them might happen—and that was some comfort.

Suddenly, however, the mules stopped once more : and this time neither blows nor words would make them move. The Marquis struck and threatened them : Pierre coaxed them : but they were deaf alike to threats and to flatteries, and callous to blows. At last, leaving them to themselves, and sheltering his eyes, or rather his one eye, from the snow with his hands, the latter went a few steps forward and looked carefully before him. Then, starting suddenly back, and seizing the bridle, he forced the mules backwards with all his force.

"Monsieur le Marquis," he said, "the will of God be done! We cannot reach Les Vacheries."

"Not reach Les Vacheries?"

"Listen to that, Monseigneur."

The Marquis listened. "I hear the river," he said.

"It is not the river that you hear, Monseigneur. The river does not sound like that."

And, in truth, the sharp, loud roar that seemed to thunder through their ears had but little in common with the dull rush of the river.

"What is it, then?"

"I know it well—it is the torrent of La Rochette."

"Are we not on the road, then? Have you lost your way?"

"We are on what *was* the road, Monseigneur."

III.

The situation of the travellers had now become more than critical. It was indeed exceedingly perilous. The road having been swept away by the swollen mountain torrent, there seemed nothing to be done but to attempt to spend the night as they were. And how was it possible so to spend it with any reasonable chance of seeing the morning?

Both the nobleman and the peasant remained in silence for a while. At last the latter said,—

"Monsieur le Marquis——"

"Well?"

"There is on the other side of this torrent a small *châlet*, high up among the hills—on the side of that hill that you can just see from here. It is called Pré-aux-Fleurs."

"Yes—and there is also a *châlet* some miles beyond called Les Vacheries! It seems to me, since they are both on the other side of the torrent, that one is as near as the other."

"I was thinking, Monsieur le Marquis——

"Well?"

"I believe I could reach it, Monseigneur."

"Indeed! So be it then. Save yourself. Better three perish than four."

"But, Monsieur le Marquis, if I can reach it, I can return. I know the people there, and I might get help. I should certainly find food."

"No, Pierre: you would only perish in the torrent."

"I think not, Monseigneur. I have crossed La Rochette at this point for a less matter, before I was married."

A sudden thought seemed to strike the Marquis.

"You say you could go and return?" he said.

"Tell me—how should you reach Pré-aux-Fleurs?"

The other led him to the edge, soft, white, and treacherous, of the descent to the river, over which the torrent was rushing headlong. Then he guided him a few steps forward till the Marquis felt the foam upon his face.

"Monseigneur will stand here," said Pierre, "and press his foot against this stump, which is firm. There he will hold a cord that I shall take from the cart. By this cord I can slip down to that slab of rock just below us, and which the spray has washed clear of snow."

"But you will still be on this side the torrent?"

"True, Monseigneur. But just where we stand the water falls down sheer to the river."

"I do not see how that can mend matters."

"Monseigneur will see. That slab of rock which I pointed out to Monseigneur projects sideways across the fall. Once upon it, I have simply to drop from its edge and the fall is cleared."

"I see."

"It is not very far—the rope will be long enough for all. I shall land upon an easy slope, and shall then have nothing to do but to go up straight to Pré-aux-Fleurs."

"You know the way?"

"*'Cre nom!* I should think so! I will call out, and Monseigneur will make a noose in the cord and fasten it over the stump."

"I see. In descending, the cord will be only of use to guide you and prevent your slipping?"

"That is all, Monseigneur."

"And otherwise there is no danger?"

"It is not even difficult, Monseigneur, for one who has done it before, and knows what to do."

"And how long shall you be gone?"

"If all is well, Monseigneur will hear me call out in two hours."

"Two hours! *Mon Dieu!*"

"But, Monseigneur——"

"Listen, Pierre. It is only too clear that in less than two hours Madame will in all probability be beyond the reach of aid. You know how ill she is—and you hear that horrible howling, that comes every moment nearer. I, too, cannot count upon two hours of life. But, if you are right in what you say, you may yet save the child."

He did not wait for an answer, but went at once to the side of the cart and raised the coverings with which it was filled. Pierre stood irresolute: and no wonder—for he guessed what the Marquis intended, and he was not eager for a responsibility that would add so much to the difficulty of the expedition that he had undertaken.

Under the heap of cloaks, upon some straw, lay a woman almost young enough to be called a girl, and, in spite of the wretchedness of her condition, still handsome, and even more than handsome. The form of her features was of that large and noble order that is superior to physical pain however severe, and argued a strength of nature that must have struggled long before it could have been thus subdued. And now it was subdued, even to the point of unconsciousness. In only two ways did she show any signs of

life: in the heavy and almost audible rise and fall of her bosom, and in the instinctive energy with which she pressed to it a young child of apparently not many weeks old, which seemed as little likely to last out the night as its mother.

After gazing upon the two for an instant, "It must be done," said the Marquis to himself, decisively. "Take the rope, Pierre."

So saying, he, not without the exertion of some force, parted the child from what appeared to be the dying embrace of its mother. Then he spread a cloak upon the snow, laid the child upon it, and tied the corners firmly together, crosswise: and then, having once more rearranged the coverings over the woman, he made his companion, who did not venture to object to the proceeding, pass his head and right arm through the spaces formed by the manner in which the corners of the cloak were tied, so that the living burden, falling behind him, was supported by his left shoulder, and left his arms free.

Pierre then, grasping the rope in both hands, in the manner which he had explained, descended slowly backwards to the narrow platform formed by the projecting piece of rock. The descent in itself was not more than moderately difficult: the only danger lay in the possibility of his feet suddenly

slipping upon the snowy incline, and of the Marquis having to let go his hold of the rope. Neither accident, however, happened: and he presently stood in safety upon the rock which, as he had said, projected across the course down which the torrent was rushing in a sheer and unbroken fall. It is true that this natural ledge did not afford him much standing room, and the height between it and the bed of the river was enough to turn any ordinary head giddy: but Pierre was mountaineer enough to be free from that weakness at least, and to be able to prepare coolly and deliberately for the downward spring that was to land him beyond the torrent.

Had he been without the encumbrance at his back, the matter, though not without risk, would have been simple enough, for the distance he had to drop was not extreme. As it was, however, the danger and difficulty of the attempt were multiplied by ten at least. Nevertheless the attempt must be made now: nor, indeed, did he think of giving it up. Calling out to the Marquis to let out the rope to its fullest extent, he wound a part of it two or three times round his wrists, and then grasping it about a couple of feet from the end, made the leap, and fell safely upon the bed of new-fallen snow below him.

But a shudder passed through him when he rose

and found himself free from the weight that had caused the whole of his danger. The corners of the bundle, necessarily ill secured, in spite of the care of the Marquis, had come unfastened by the slight shock of the leap. But his fear was for a moment only, though it almost came back upon him when he saw how few inches lay between the child and the water-course—so few, indeed, that to recover it was by far the greatest risk that he had had to run.

But he did recover it, and, thanks to the soft bed on which it had fallen, he found it uninjured by the accident. Then he released his wrists from the rope, the end of which he fastened to a bush—shouted out to announce his safety and that of his charge—and then struck into a sort of path that crossed the road, and led, by a long but easy ascent, to the hills.

On and on he went, while the cold wind whistled about his ears, carrying upon its breath many strange and distant sounds. But he felt no fear of imaginary dangers. A man into whose composition entered a single grain of fancy would have seen and heard all manner of terrible things, when alone on a winter's night among the hills. But Pierre was on well-known ground, and he had not a grain of fancy about him. He realised that he was cold, and that he was hungry, but nothing more : and he measured the con-

dition, both mental and bodily, of those whom he had left by the standard of his own. He would not have minded spending the whole night out of doors as long as he had something to eat and drink: and as he doubted not the hospitality of Pré-aux-Fleurs, he doubted nothing. He even sang, not to scare away ghosts, but out of the genuine courage, or rather fearlessness, of his heart: for a heart can scarcely be called courageous that has no sense of fear. Nevertheless, in spite of all this rough carelessness, the Marquise herself could have found no want of tenderness in the way in which he carried her child.

Still, even to him, it was a welcome sight when he saw across an open space the flickering light in the window of Pré-aux-Fleurs. He stepped out faster, and in a few minutes more was knocking loudly upon the door with his fist.

The first sound he heard was the whining and scratching of the dog, as if it was striving to reach him through the door: then,—

“Who is there?” cried out a sharp but timid voice from within.

“It is I, aunt Cathon.”

“*Mon Dieu!* It is Pierre!” and the door opened. Without another word he entered the room, the dog

leaping about him in a state of frantic delight, and aunt Cathon following in one of fear and anxiety.

"Ah, he is wounded!" she exclaimed, when he was fairly within the glow of the fire. The young woman started, gave a slight cry, and threw her arms round him, without observing the child.

"Is all over?" asked the priest, anxiously.

"And Monsieur le Marquis?" asked aunt Cathon in the same breath.

"Monseigneur is on the other side of the torrent of La Rochette. It has broken through the road. Madame is with him. This is their child—down, Loup!—take the child, Susanne—and there they'll have to stay till to-morrow."

His words seemed to turn those who heard them into stone. Now, indeed, the end of all things must have come.

"You must get them something, aunt Cathon," said Pierre, without giving them time to collect themselves. "I must go back to them at once."

Without a word the old woman ran off to find the best of what she had. The Curé approached the child, at which Susanne was gazing with awe.

"Poor child!" he said. "And you crossed the torrent with this? Is it possible?"

Pierre nodded.

The priest looked at it more closely. Then he exclaimed,—

“But it is dying! Take it, Susanne—take it in your arms. But I fear it is too late.”

In truth, the infant seemed to have but little appearance of life. The young woman took it, and sat down with it in her lap before the fire: but the warmth had no effect. Then she stooped over it and raised it to her breast: but it still remained motionless. After all, it was almost a miracle that it had survived so long, for it seemed to be but weak and delicate by nature.

The Curé watched her vain efforts to revive it in silence. At last—“I wonder whether it is baptised?” he said, half to himself, half to Pierre.

The latter shook his head doubtfully.

“I doubt,” the Curé went on, in the same half-questioning tone, “if Monsieur le Marquis thought much of the blessed sacraments.”

“I’m sure he didn’t,” said Pierre, decidedly.

“And Madame la Marquise?”

“I have heard say she is a heretic.”

The Curé crossed himself. “Poor little one! and I more than fear it has scarce an hour to live. And Monsieur le Marquis and Madame—they too, perhaps, will not live through the night. As to the

child, my duty is clear. But—could I reach Monseigneur, think you, Pierre?”

“Impossible, my father.”

“But you will do it?”

“It will be as much as I can do.”

“Are you sure I could not?”

“What! across the torrent?”

“You swear to me that it would be quite impossible?”

“I swear, Monsieur le Curé, that, if you tried, you would most surely find yourself in the river.”

The priest did not look like one who was made to be an active martyr, although he would have suffered passively as bravely as any one. “If it is impossible it is impossible,” he sighed. “But at least the innocent child shall live, if not in this world, yet in the next. What is its name, Pierre?”

“I never heard it.”

“And I do not know that of Monsieur le Marquis. Never mind—I will take it on myself, then.” So saying, he dipped his finger into a basin of water, and, making on the child's forehead the sign of the cross, said,—

“*Felix, si non es baptizatus, ego baptizo te in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, Amen.* The name is of good omen, and is that of our blessed patron.

Yes: I have done what is right, even though the Seigneur may blame me. I thank the *Seigneur des seigneurs* for having kept me here this night!"

Just then aunt Cathon returned, bearing a basket which, from its size, proved that she had thought rather of the necessities of Monsieur le Marquis than of the arms of Pierre. But the strength of the latter was fully equal to the occasion.

"I shall return, aunt Cathon," he said, "as soon as it is light. We shall have to contrive some way of bringing Monseigneur and Madame to Pré-aux-Fleurs. You had better send to Les Vacheries in the morning for help." He stooped over and kissed the cheek of Susanne, who was weeping silently over the child, and then once more stepped out into the night, followed by Loup, who seemed to prefer his master even to the fire.

IV.

So much, at present, for the brave mountaineer and his helpless charge. It is time to return to the more important persons who were waiting for their chance of safety.

The Marquis, on hearing Pierre's parting shout,

satisfied himself that the lady was as well protected from the cold night as circumstances would allow, gave a look to the mules, and then wearily seated himself by the roadside to wait in patience until the promised two hours should have dragged themselves away. Meanwhile the snow had ceased: the cry of the wolves had died away in the distance, and all was still, save for the roar of the water, which, however, like all continuous sounds, seemed to mingle with the silence rather than to destroy it. Little by little the grey mist cleared away, and brought into sight the winter moon that, small and pale, threw a wild light upon the snow and upon the wet crag that overhung the torrent. Nature seemed to have sunk into repose again: and it was difficult for one who was utterly fatigued both in mind and body not to sympathise with her repose. Besides, cold is in itself a soporific: and the Marquis had scarcely slept for many nights and days.

Moonlight upon the snow! The very words are full of magic meaning, and the thing is magic itself. Transformation is the very secret of its influence. It does away with form and proportion: it reverses distances, making the near seem far and the far near: it sheds upon all it touches colours, lights and shadows unknown to reality:

it rarefies air into mist, and all less substantial things into air. Nor are its changes confined to the material world alone. Our true lives become unreal, and our most passing fancies usurp the place of what is true. Vague and unfounded apprehensions, and still more vague and unfounded hopes, of which not one can be expressed in any tangible form, take the place of foresight and of memory. Not only so, but they cause us to fear where we have every reason to hope, and to be careless where we ought to fear. This is so even on a summer night: and winter and solitude together intensify the mysteries of the moonlight a hundred-fold.

Thus the watcher in the snow could not be said to think while he waited. He dreamed: and the treacherous cold that wrapped him round caused his dreams more and more to resemble the dreams of actual sleep.

At last, indeed, he was no longer a watcher among the hills of the Jura. He was a wanderer in fairyland, and in that most delusive region of the whole world of dreams in which the actors take the shapes of those whom we know in the real world.

Young in reality, he grew, as is almost invariably the case in dreams, much younger. The snowy ground on which he sat changed to a rich carpet: the

hills covered with the outskirts of the grey forest approached one another until they formed the four walls of a room, hung with warmly-coloured pictures: the sky became a ceiling painted with gods and goddesses: the light of the pale moon brightened into the brilliancy of lamps: the rush of the torrent turned into a no less continuous flow of conversation, and the silent trees into a crowd that laughed and talked the language, not of trees, but of men and women of the world. It was as though some genii had transported him backwards over space and time into the midst of some Parisian *salon* of which the poor lady who seemed to be dying near him became once more the noblest ornament: for she, too, was touched by the same magic wand.

He was still near her—so near, indeed, that he felt the touch of her breath and of her hair. But he felt a cold weight at his heart that prevented him from uttering a word: and he knew that her heart was weighed down by the same heaviness. Presently, without regard to the company round them, by whom they were as little regarded, he took her by the hand, the warmth of which he felt with most undreamlike distinctness, and proceeded to lead her through endless passages and up and down countless stairs, some light and some dark, some crowded and

some deserted, until they reached a room, which was empty, gloomy, and cold. Here, still holding her by the hand, he again made an attempt to speak: but he could only think of absurd and meaningless words: and even these he could not pronounce. And yet she seemed to understand them: for she said, in her own voice, and looking full into his face with her own eyes,—

“And why should I? Have I not made up my mind?”

“*Arma virumque cano Trojæ qui primus—*”

Somehow he seemed to be growing younger still: and the room was surely that in which he had tried to construe Virgil twenty years ago. He almost wondered that he had not recognised it before.

“Only let us go home,” she said.

“Dearest Anne! Yes—the vacation will begin to-morrow. And you will come too?”

His whole life seemed to depend upon her not fading away just then. He put his left arm round her to detain her, still with his right hand holding hers, and she was just about to answer, when the shout as of an angry mob filled his ears. Suddenly he let go her hand. He started, and for an instant looked heavily about him, and then tried to stretch his limbs, which were numbed with cold.

"Can I have been dreaming?" he said to himself. "A strange place to go to sleep in! But surely that sound I heard was no dream."

He listened: but all was still. But in another moment he heard below him the strong voice of Pierre, so pitched as to pierce through the roar of the water.

"Ah! it is Pierre returned—thank God!" and he called out in his turn.

And now to draw in and fix the rope. But, to his dismay, he found that the dream-genii had been treacherous indeed. The warm hand that he had dropped so suddenly when startled by the voice of Pierre, had in truth been nothing less than the very cord upon which in all probability depended the life of her who had filled his dreams. He sought for it carefully: but it was only too clear that the end of it which he ought to have guarded had slipped over the verge of the road.

"Pierre!" he shouted, at the extreme pitch of his voice.

"Draw the rope, Monsieur!"

"It has fallen over. What is to be done?"

"*Sacre nom de Dieu!*"

"What is to be done?"

"I have this end of it. Monsieur must come down to the rock. Perhaps I can throw it to him there."

This was easier said than done. The Marquis had not the sure feet of Pierre: and even the latter could not have descended in perfect safety without some guidance.

It must be done, however. Carefully noting the position of the slab of wet rock with his eye, he lost no time in sliding, as gently and as slowly as he could, down the face of the hill, until his feet were stopped by the stone. Then, kneeling down, he saw Pierre standing just below him. His position was anything but pleasant: for the single glance that he ventured to cast down the front of the hill made him turn almost giddy; and the water that thundered under his feet made the ledge on which he was supported shake and tremble, while his face was dashed by its foam.

"Is the child safe?" he asked at once, and anxiously.

"Quite safe, Monsieur le Marquis. I have drawn up the cord, and will throw one end to you there. But do not move, except to catch it."

After a few unsuccessful attempts it was caught.

"And now?" asked the Marquis.

"Monseigneur will find it difficult to climb back without help. I must get on to the rock. It is very unlucky that Monseigneur let go the rope."

"And how will you get on to it? And there is barely room for two."

Pierre considered for a moment. "It was very unlucky," he repeated. "Would Monseigneur perhaps try to climb back? It would be the best way, if he could manage it."

"I will try."

"Monseigneur must be careful. He had better keep his eyes on the stump, and never look downwards."

"And then?"

"Monseigneur will fasten the noose to the stump. I can climb up then."

Fastening the cord round his body, that it might not slip out of his hands again, the Marquis de Croisville attempted, with his numbed limbs and reeling sight, to breast the steep bank of snow. But the attempt was hopeless, and he had to give it up in despair.

"Pierre," he called out, "I cannot climb three steps."

The other was silent for a while. Then he said,—

"Then let Monseigneur make all the room he can."

The Marquis crouched down against the snow-bank. Pierre, putting his whole strength into the

spring, leaped upwards: and, by an effort of immense activity, succeeded in reaching with his hands the rough edge of the stone, to which he proceeded to draw up his body. It was a perilous position: but, for so good a mountaineer, apparently far from desperate.

Only apparently, however. It was too true that the stone was only made for one, though not in the sense intended by the Marquis. The frosts and thaws of a thousand winters had done their work upon it: and though it had room, it had not strength for two.

With a thundering sound, and with one wild cry, the rock and the two victims of a dream fell together headlong down the steep, straight course of the torrent. There is no need to trace the fall of that confused mass of broken rock and shattered limbs: for it would be absurd to suppose that any creature could make that descent and remain for a single instant alive.

V.

Whatever comes with the night, no matter how real and vivid it may be, is always of the nature of a dream: while, on the other hand, the most dim

and dreamlike of mornings always brings with it a sensation of reality. Not only is this the case with man but with nature also: and now, when morning came, the hills seemed literally to wake, even although the light of the moon had been brighter and more distinct than that of the winter day-break. Dull as daylight may be, it is at all events preferable to the excitements of nightmare. The very torrent, as it foamed over the road, and reflected the red globe of the sun, seemed to have forgotten the mischief that it had brought about: for the departure of the night had deprived it of at least half its grandeur and nearly all its terror.

Nevertheless the fact remained, that the number of strong men in the world was less by two—not that that can be considered much, perhaps, when every day strong men as well as weak were being forced out of the world by hundreds. As to the Marquise, it may seem incredible, or almost incredible, that she should have survived the cold, the weariness, and the pain in which she lay. But experience proves that it is by no means incredible. There are some constitutions that may seem to be utterly broken and yet remain proof against death—that cannot die, in fact, except from old age. And it is just among delicate women that this intense

vital force is generally most strongly developed. In narratives of shipwreck and famine we invariably find that it is tenderly-nurtured women who prove most superior to hardship. Whether it is that delicacy and strength of organisation are identical: whether it is that women who habitually expend little muscular exertion acquire thereby a larger reserve fund of passive strength, or whether it is that their frames are by nature better adapted for mere endurance than those of men, the fact that seemingly weak women do often live through what would almost to a certainty kill the strongest man, cannot be doubted: and it is a strong illustration of any one of these theories that, during the past night, the Marquise de Croisville did not die.

About sunrise her trance changed into a natural sleep, which, had it come upon her during the cold of night, must have inevitably caused her death in spite of her possessing any amount of vital force. After an hour or two she woke, and managed partially to raise herself from her bed of cloaks and straw.

She found herself alone, in a white waste of silence: for to the sound of the water her ears had accustomed themselves unconsciously. It was long before she could collect her thoughts: long, even,

before she felt about her for her child: longer still before she could realise the fact that it was gone from her.

But she did realise it at last: and then the rush of returning consciousness brought with it a new strength that was almost unnatural. She rose almost completely: she strove to call out her husband's name. But in spite of what might almost be called the madness of her fearful anxiety, she could only fall back once more, and her attempt to speak only ended in a cry of anguish. She stretched out her arms to grasp the air: then she listened with an intentness that would have caught the faintest and most distant sound had there been any distant sound to hear: and then God knows into what a state of utter terror, of utter desolation, of utter helplessness, she fell—unable to move, unable to think, unable even to moan. That madness itself did not come to her relief is almost a miracle. Perhaps it was the weakness of her body that saved her: it must certainly have been to a great extent the strength of her mind. What she felt cannot be called mental anguish, for she was without any conscious impression of anything. The mere fact that she still lived was all that she knew: and that was more than enough. No anguish, however bitter, was needed

to add to the intense bitterness of each moment of mere life.

How long she lay in this condition cannot be told. To her it seemed as though she lingered through centuries: but then many centuries of life may be contained in a single moment of time. It could not have been really long, or there would have been some attempt at communication from Pré-aux-Fleurs. At last, however, her strained ears did catch a sound. It was that of two voices approaching along the road towards her, and on the same side of the torrent.

"Are you sure we are on the road, Jules?" asked one.

"'Sure' is a strong word. I'm never sure of anything. *Diable!* how cold I am!"

"Cold? I swear to you that if we do not reach somewhere in half an hour you will have to leave me on the road. My feet are ice."

"Take some brandy. Who can tell where he is among these cursed hills? But this was said to lead to Saint Félix."

"Saint *Ignis fatuus*, I should think. What a noise of water!"

"Only the river, I suppose. What a night we have passed! I only hope that there may turn out to be a hell after all."

"Why so?"

"Because we shall have had our turn, and some people will be pretty sure to have theirs."

"They say the worst parts of hell are its cold corners."

"I should think so. I would be put on a spit with pleasure just now."

"And I would eat you with pleasure before you were half done. But, talking of hell, what in the devil's name have we here?"

The other shrugged his shoulders. "A woman! poor wretch! She has escaped *la sainte mère*, any way." This, it may be supposed, was his euphemism for the guillotine.

"But she may be alive."

"Impossible. But, praise be to Death! he has sent us a cart and a pair of mules. We will send the corpse rolling down the hill and take possession. My faith! Carrier would have sent the *citoyenne* down alive."

"But, Jules, had we not better see——"

"See nothing, my friend; that is the wisest way."

The other, who had gone a few steps in advance, made a sudden exclamation, which brought his companion to his side.

They looked at the torrent and then at each other

in blank despair. At last said he who had been called Jules, and who had proposed to deal so summarily with the Marquise,—

“Then there is an end of us, *mon ami* ;” and he smiled in a way that made him by no means pleasant to look on. Indeed, in other respects the two companions were sufficiently unattractive; and yet they were even still more pitiable. Their accent and their language were good, and were not even provincial: but they were barely covered with wet and filthy rags, their faces were grimed with dirt and black stubble, and they seemed as though brandy had been meat and drink to them for days. They also were doubtless victims of the time.

“An end of the road, you mean,” answered the other, whose fainting energy seemed to be revived by the extremity of their situation. “Here is this cart, as you say. It is clear that the *citoyenne* is in much the same boat as we are—and,” he added, going to side of the cart, “not unlike an aristocrat. Poor girl!”—and he looked at her again—“she has not long to live, I should say. Hand the brandy. See, she opens her eyes. Are they not fine ones too?”

“What are you saying about fine eyes?”

“Oh, I was thinking that we might drive a better

bargain than if we threw away our goods—that's all."

"You speak in riddles."

"Not at all. Look here, Jules. Let us ride back the way we came. When we reach the three roads, let us take that which leads to Besançon—that is all. No one knows us there, and no one will care to ask us questions if we bring so fair a postulant to the altar of the *sainte mère*. And if they choose to trim our beards as well—why, I don't see that we shall lose much. We shall never get alive out of these accursed hills."

The poor Marquise at last found her voice. "Take me where you please," she said, feebly; "I am ready."

"Hm! a foreigner! Are you alone, *citoyenne*?"

She considered what she should reply. Suppose that her husband and her child had left her to seek aid and shelter? Suppose that in fact they had found it? It would never do to run the risk of letting these men, plainly rendered desperate by danger and misery, know anything about them. Besides, what did it matter how she died? In any case she expected to die in a few hours at most: and her reason told her that to insure their safety it would be fully worth her while to forfeit her chance

of having a last but useless interview with them. But just as she was on the point of saying "Quite alone," a large dog scrambled over the side of the road, bearing in his mouth a handkerchief of fine cambric.

One of the two men showed it to her, while the dog tried to draw the other to the edge of the water-course. She saw that it was her husband's: and when he who had followed the dog said, "Ah, it is plain that the *citoyenne* is alone if her friends tried to break their necks by getting round here," it was clear enough to her what the fate of her husband and of her child must have been.

"What is your name, *citoyenne*?" asked Jules, who held the handkerchief.

"The Marquise de Croisville."

The two men exchanged meaning looks. "You are not French?"

"I am English."

"*Que diable allait-elle faire dans cette galère?*"

Well, there is no help for it. Turn the mules round, if their knees are not as stiff as mine. There, *citoyenne*, we'll make you as comfortable as we can. Who knows? Perhaps we are all going to visit *la mère guillotine* together. Well, death is but death after all: and whether it comes by the knife or the

cold, what matter? Courage, *citoyenne*! Who knows what may happen?" And with a sort of reckless gaiety he began to sing,—

“ ‘*Ca ira, ça ira,
Les aristocrates à la lanterne !*’ ”

“Hush!” said the other, who, though he had proposed the scheme, was less brutal in manner.

“Not I,” replied Jules, dragging round the mules with a will, and with no sparing of blows, “we must learn to be good Montagnards—curse them! One must try to live, after all. And if we have to die with the *citoyenne*, we will give them in their teeth the good old Marseillaise.”

A sudden light came into the pale face of the Marquise. Tears for the first time flooded her eyes, and, after one glance at the torrent which now lay behind her, she looked up to heaven.

“I am justly punished,” she murmured to herself in English. Then, once more in French, she said in a strong full voice that seemed to tell of conquest over self, “And if I have to die, with you or without you, my last word shall be *Vive le Roi!*”

But it was a last effort, and she fell back exhausted. The two men shrugged their shoulders at one another, and the cart once more went on in silence.

SECOND PART—IN ENGLAND.

CONTAINING THE EVENTS OF TWENTY-TWO YEARS
AND FIVE MONTHS.

I.

THE reader has now made the acquaintance of at least one of the *dramatis personæ* of this history. He must now, in order to make the acquaintance of some others, be transported to a land of which every spot has for long been a Saint-Félix-des-Rochers for all who can find no refuge elsewhere.

In thought, then, let him, wherever his body may happen to be, leave far behind him the snowy hills of the Swiss frontier, where Nature, even, had for once proved herself powerless to save the victims of her enemy, man: let him pass westward until the howling of the wolves of the forest has become drowned in the fiercer and more terrible clamour of those of the city: let him turn northward until the

sea at last has set a bound to the deluge of blood—until he finds himself within the safe and peaceful barrier of the white cliffs upon which the hymns of the *sainte mère*, near and loud though they are, fall only like an echo carried by the life-giving sea-breeze from some dim land of dreams. Then let him pass through Kent, whose snows will melt, not, like those he has left behind him, to uncover barrenness, but abundance: and, having reached London itself, let him, again turning due westward, travel quietly on, until, from the ridge of a high table-land, he looks over the town where for the present his thoughts must take up their abode.

This town is called Denethorp, and is one of a numerous class of places that have been ruined by railways. Once upon a time it was not a mere country town like any other country town. As far back as the reign of Elizabeth it had been famous for its manufacture of woollen fabrics, and its weavers and clothiers still formed a privileged class, and had once been a real power in the land. The curious may still see, in the office of its clerk of the peace, two or three charters, of various degrees of antiquity, conferring upon the place various strange, valueless, and impolitic rights and immunities. For a long time its prosperity continued. Machines

became invented and improved: and one of the most celebrated inventors and improvers was a Denethorp man. Then the place improved also. Mills began to be built on every side: new settlers came from a distance: and, what with strikes and machine-breaking, the Recorder of the day began to find his hands quite full. But, when machinery began to be applied to locomotion as well as to manufacture, and when the country began to find out that the goods which formed the staple of the place were more easily and cheaply obtained from the north than from the south-west, the prosperity of the place simply collapsed, never to be restored. It is difficult now to see what use is fulfilled by its existence, except to provide the neighbouring parishes with a market for the purpose of selling corn by sample.

It was here, then, in this little town, that, in the days of its modest prosperity, and before those of its vain ambition, "the Doctor," as he was called by neighbours, or Mr Warden, as they should have called him—for he was not entitled to write himself M.D.—was sitting with his young wife in the parlour of his newly-furnished brick house that stood in the outskirts of the town, and that had a sort of prescriptive right to be the house of the doctor for

the time being. He was a young man who had not long since come from Redchester, and had paid money for his practice in Denethorp. It was upon the strength of that practice that he had taken a wife.

Young as he was—he could not well be more than thirty—the most unskilled observer could not have taken him for anything but a country doctor of a well-known but not of the highest type. He was tall and robust, but inclined to fatness, with a red full face that told of much exposure to wind and weather, and with a little of that undefinable look about him that belongs to a man who spends a great deal of his time on horseback as part of his regular day's work. His hands were large and red, but well trimmed and cared for: and his expression—which was by nature that of a good-humoured, easy-going fellow, who would complacently take the good and ill of life, whichever might happen to turn up, without making any particular effort to secure the one or to avoid the other—had already acquired something of that unmistakable sort of artificial gravity that is peculiar to and inseparable from the profession of medicine. Women of his own rank of life, which was obviously not very high, who regarded only his

number of inches, his curling brown hair, his blue eyes, his white teeth, and his round and jolly voice, were unanimous in thinking the new doctor a handsome man : and, doubtless, his plain, quiet-looking wife, the daughter of a druggist in Redchester, had been of that opinion also. With the men of the place, too, he got on famously. They set him down as a good fellow, and considered him an acquisition to the club of tradesmen that met nightly behind the bar of the King's Head. Thus, what with his personal and social advantages, his youth did not tell much against his professional prospects. Indeed, for that matter, when he first came to Denethorp its inhabitants had to exercise Hobson's choice in the selection of their physician. Patients had either to go to "the Doctor," or else to doctor themselves : and it soon became an understood thing that people must avoid being taken suddenly ill when the hounds met within the reach of a man who kept but one horse.

On the whole, it was thought by her friends that Mrs Warden had done very well indeed for herself and her family in marrying the doctor at Denethorp. It is true that, when she and her husband had become well settled down, she found that she had to spend a good many solitary hours : but that she took

as a matter of course. To spend his evenings among his acquaintances, settling the affairs of the world, the nation, and the town, until he had drunk more punch than was quite good for him, was, according to her experience, only a necessary phenomenon of the masculine nature. Her father had always done the same: so had her brothers: so had every tradesman and professional man in her native place: and, had her experience been very much wider than it was, she would have found much the same state of things everywhere throughout the kingdom. It was, at all events, a symptom of the time, of which she never complained or dreamed of complaining.

But on this particular evening it was far too cold to tempt the Doctor to turn out unnecessarily, even to go as far as the King's Head. So he contented himself with drawing his chair well into the fire, placing his big feet on the brightly-polished fender, mixing himself a stiff tumbler of hot grog, filling his long clay pipe, and so preparing to enjoy a domestic evening with his wife, who was devoting to needlework all the attention that she could spare from the baby.

It must not, however, be supposed that the hour was by any means late. The Doctor used to begin his evening as soon as he had dined, when no patient happened to come between him and his home com-

forts : and the church-clock had struck no more than four when he took the first sip from his glass. By the time that he had taken a second, a horn was heard, of which the well-known sound announced the arrival of the coach from Redchester.

"Poor devils of outsiders !" said the Doctor. "They must be frozen to each other's sides. Well, thank the Lord, I'm not likely to be wanted to-night."

"How is Anne Webb, Jack ?"

"Oh, she can't be so unmerciful as to be confined on such a night — except to the house," and he laughed at his own joke. "Not bad that — eh, Lorry ?"

Mrs Warden smiled, but merely out of sympathy : for anything like a joke was altogether beyond her.

"I say, Lorry," he said, after a pause of some ten minutes, "this frost is a confounded shame. I meant to have had at least two days. But that's always the way when the meet's hard by and one has just a bit of spare time."

Just then the clock struck the quarter : and as this is the whole of the conversation that passed between them in the space of fifteen minutes, it may be fairly assumed that the Doctor belonged to that numerous class who are by no means so sociable at home as they are when abroad.

But he was not fated to lose his evening's gossip after all. The clock had not had time to chime another quarter when a knock at the door announced the arrival, cold as the evening was, of a young man of about the same age as the Doctor, but of a smarter and sharper appearance.

"Why, White, my boy!—well, I do call this friendly. Hope nothing's the matter, though?"

"Nothing but cold, and that you can set right for me without going to the surgery. How snug you are in here! Have you any sisters, Mrs Warden? Because then——"

Mrs Warden smiled pleasantly.

"Have you looked in at the Head, White?" asked her husband.

"For a minute: but it was dull as ditch-water. There were only Willet, you know, and old Smith: and I couldn't stand that, of course. So as I knew my fire would be out, I came on to yours."

"Make yourself comfortable, then."

"I will. What's the news?"

"Oh, there's a good crop of rheumatism just now, and that sort of thing. But, between you and I, the place is a bit of a sell."

"Why so?"

"One can't make much out of rheumatism. What

I like are patients with gout, my boy: they're the sort to pay."

"I see."

"We're not like you lawyers: we can't make patients as you do clients if they're not ready made."

"I don't know about that."

"Well, anyhow, it's a poor sort of place, only to have one good family within a dozen miles."

"The Raymonds? But then they're a dozen in themselves."

"Poor little things!" said Mrs Warden, compassionately.

"Yes, they take a lot of physic: but then they give one a lot of trouble. Mrs Raymond seems to think one has nothing to do but run after her children if one of their little fingers aches. And what's the news with you?"

"With me? oh, nothing. But there's some news of one of our clients that'll interest you—and you too, Mrs Warden."

"And what's that?"

"Old Clare's coming back."

"What!—to Earl's Dene?"

"Yes—and Miss with him."

"Then there'll be some fine doings this winter, I suppose?"

"Hm! The old gentleman's coming to be quiet, he says: and Miss must have changed from what she was if we get any fine doings out of her."

"What was she, then?"

"She wasn't down here much, you know. But she was very odd—damned odd, in fact: and I don't think she and the old gentleman used to pull too well together."

"Will of her own, eh?"

"And a very queer will too. I don't believe she ever danced since she was born."

"Methodistical?"

"Proud, I should say."

"Pretty?"

"So, so. But I don't care much for that style. I think a pretty woman's one that'll let you kiss her—ha, ha, ha!"

"For shame, Mr White!" said Mrs Warden.

"Why, there were a lot of fellows mad about her, I know; and she'd never speak to one of 'em. And well they might be; for I don't mind saying that I'd give a round plum for her myself if I had it, and be a good many pennies the richer."

"Perhaps she did her flirting up in town?"

"She was queerer up there than down here."

"What did she do there, then?"

"I have to see the old gentleman sometimes, you know, up in London: so I've met her at dinner. I sat next a bishop once at the last election time. I wonder who'll stand for the county now?"

"And Miss Clare?"

"Miss Anne? she talked—didn't she talk! The bishop was scared out of his seven senses, and the old gentleman got to look like a lobster—and no wonder."

"And what did she talk about?"

"Lord knows what she didn't! But she made out everything to be shams—Crown, and Lords, and Parliament, and law and all: and as to the Constitution—damme, I can't say what she didn't say: I know she made me stare."

"But that was treason!" said the Doctor.

"And blasphemy!" said his wife.

"If I'd been her father, I'd have whipped her and packed her off to bed. I expect that's why he sent her abroad."

"Why, the devil must be in the girl," said the Doctor. "I must get up diseases of the brain before they come home, and lay in a stock of strait-waistcoats. We are to have nice neighbours, it seems."

"It must be a great trial for the poor old gentleman," said the lawyer, "and he member for the

county, and a good Tory, and all. You'll have two good patients, I expect, in a day or two."

"How long has she been abroad?"

"Oh, it's some years now. It was just before those damned Frenchmen began to play their pranks."

"Began to? as if one didn't know what the French were, ever since—ever since one was born. A cowardly pack of vermin! I wish I had the doctoring of a few."

"Oh, John!" said Mrs Warden.

"I do, though. I know what dose I'd give a Frenchman. He wouldn't care to try it twice, I fancy. Ha, ha, ha!"

"What'd you give him?" asked the lawyer.

"Something that'd soon make him bring up his frogs, anyhow."

"I thought you meant you'd treat him surgically."

"So I would, too. I'd cut his frog-swallowing throat, and hang him up by his own wooden heels: and that's surgical enough, I think."

Mr Warden was certainly beginning to get comfortable. Indeed he was getting remarkably so, when a neat-looking servant-girl entered the room with the unwelcome news—does it not always happen so?—that the Doctor was wanted.

His first words on being disturbed were about as

complimentary to his patients in general as his last had been to the French nation : his next were a distinct refusal to turn out, even if the message had come from Earl's Dene itself—which was not likely, seeing that Mr Clare was in London and Miss Clare abroad.

"But hadn't you better see who it is, John?" asked his wife, quietly.

"And who the devil is it?"

"'Tis Dick, ostler from the Head, sir. A lady's been took bad in the coach."

"Confound her! Couldn't she wait till she got to Sturfield? Well, if I must I must, I suppose. Where is she? At the Head? I daresay it's nothing."

With his wife's aid he wrapped himself up, and then, having primed himself with another stiff half-tumbler, he set off towards the market-place accompanied by the messenger.

"What is it, do you know, Dick?"

"Not I, Doctor, nor nobody. Lady's got a genelman, as is from foreign parts, belike. Leastwise none on us can't make 'em out, not none: not even missus."

"Then, Dick, if the missus can't, nobody can."

"Right for you, Doctor. She be a sharp un!"

The King's Head was in a state of extraordinary commotion, which hardly calmed down even upon the arrival of the Doctor. The ordinary bustle consequent upon the change of horses was over: but the landlord was staring and whistling in a bewildered way, the chamber-maid was running wildly, and without an object, up and down stairs, and the sharp mistress was scolding everybody impartially, and without reason. One or two *habitués* of the parlour, whom no weather had been known to keep away for twenty years, were both talking at once and giving all sorts of contradictory advice, to which no one listened.

The Doctor himself was seized upon by the landlady, who at once led him to an up-stairs bedroom.

He saw a woman lying upon the bed, a man, whom he guessed to be her husband, standing by her side in a state of helpless distress, and a little girl, of some three or four years of age, crying in a corner. On addressing the man, he found him to be a Frenchman: but as neither could speak a word of the other's language, the discovery was not of much use. Turning, therefore, his attention to the woman, he saw that she was in a raging fever that would in all probability confine her to bed for many weeks to come, even if it ever allowed her to leave it alive.

Having done what he could under the circumstances—giving the landlady such directions as he thought necessary—told her not to be alarmed about the expense for a day or two—and had another glass of grog at the bar—he went straight home, and, as he always did under circumstances that at all ran out of the usual groove, consulted his wife. She, as she was apt to do, said little, but did the wisest thing that could be done. She made her husband go to bed, went to bed herself, called at the King's Head early the next morning, and then, without delay, went to see Mrs Raymond of New Court.

II.

There have been so many good women in the world—for everybody knows or has known one, and most people know or have known more than one—that it would be unfair and invidious to say of any one woman that she was the best who ever lived. Nevertheless, had all Denethorp and all its neighbourhood been polled on the subject, it would have given an unhesitating and unanimous vote for this Mrs Raymond. She more than supplied the want of a resident family at Earl's Dene: and if New Court

had but little political influence, it had all the love and affection that Earl's Dene wanted. If she had lived beyond middle age it may safely be said that none of the complications of this history would ever have been brought about: for nothing with which she had to do was ever known to go wrong. As for her husband, he was anything but a nonentity: he was a most admirable country gentleman—and than that what higher praise can be bestowed?—but he believed in his wife as much as the rest of their world, or even more, if that had been possible. There are some women whose husbands at their death have nothing left but to sit down and die for company: and Mrs Raymond of New Court was one of these women.

This excellent lady lost no time in becoming acquainted with the unfortunate strangers, whom she found out to be French refugees trying to make their way to London—not because they had friends or prospects there, but just because they knew not where else to go. The child, she learned also, was not a daughter, but an orphan niece of Madame. As much through her care and kindness as through any skill of his, the Doctor's patient recovered: and there would have been no difficulty about his bill even had he made any. And then it ended in Monsieur and

Madame Lefort establishing themselves in Denethorp for good and all. They could teach a great many things between them : and so they joined that large army of emigrant teachers of whom those of us who can date back the days of their instruction to the beginning of the century have so many recollections, half ludicrous, half pathetic.

At first, of course, Denethorp did not afford these two very much opening : and they had to thank their patroness for tiding them over a great many early difficulties. In acting thus towards them, the lady of New Court was no doubt mainly moved by the generosity of her heart : but she had another motive. Her little girl, her only surviving child—for, as a mother, she had been as unfortunate as she had deserved to be the reverse—was within a year or two of needing teachers, and the mother could not but feel what an admirable thing it would be to have two persons close at hand who would save her from being obliged to send her child away too soon. In a few years, too, the new prosperity of the town created a class of mill-owners' daughters with an ambition of becoming fine ladies : and a girl-school sprang up in the place which was patronised by many Redchester people. So that, ere long, the position of the foreigners considerably improved.

They were both young at the time of their arrival: and not very long after it, Madame Lefort bore her husband a daughter, who was christened Marie. About ten years afterwards she gave her husband a second family, as it were, in the persons of a boy and a girl—in giving birth to the latter of whom she, after having been in chronic ill-health for some years past, died.

Death, indeed, had been busy at Denethorp just then, and had carried away at least three of those who have been mentioned in this chapter—mentioned, apparently, only that they might immediately disappear.

Not only had Madame Lefort left her husband with a young family upon his hands, but her friend Mrs Warden and her patroness Mrs Raymond were also no more: and Alice Raymond, the young heiress of New Court, was soon left not only motherless but fatherless also.

The latter, when Europe was once more at peace, was sent by her guardians to finish her education abroad: and, at her own request, was allowed to take with her the niece of Madame Lefort, who had always been a pet at New Court, and had to a very great extent been a sharer in the lessons and games of its heiress. Alice managed this arrangement quite as

much for the sake of her own pleasure and comfort as in order to keep up her mother's kindness to the family: indeed, her affection for her playmate was that of a sister. And so now she carried her off to Paris as her companion, both in name and in fact.

Marie, however, had never been so fortunate as to have had much share in her cousin's advantages. While the two were yet mere children, and the latter was spending half her time at New Court, she was left pretty much to the companionship of the Doctor's two children. The elder girl was clever, pretty, and interesting: Marie was plain, not clever, and decidedly uninteresting. She was so quiet, so shy, and, in consequence, so awkward, that she was worse than unnoticeable: and as everybody told her how stupid she was, she naturally came at last to deserve the reproach to some extent. In truth, she was not so much stupid as slow: but as the difference between slowness and stupidity is almost always imperceptible, it is no wonder that those about her did not perceive it. Such merits as she had were negative, and were such as by their very nature draw no attention and interest no one. Two of these were merits, however, that, uninteresting and unobtrusive as they are, must be allowed to compensate for a want of those brilliant qualities with which they

are so seldom combined : she had the sweetest temper in the world, and she was wholly free from the slightest taint of jealousy. She was no more jealous of the affection that every one showered upon her cousin, and gave to her so very sparingly, than the moon is jealous of the sun. She was indeed herself her cousin's warmest and devoted admirer : and the more her heroine was admired the more she herself was pleased.

As these two grew up the difference between them widened and widened, even when approaching womanhood made Marie less absurdly shy and much less plain. Indeed, in point of looks, she became even good-looking enough to be spoken of by strangers, if they noticed her at all and her cousin was not by, as a rather pretty girl. But no one had ever said so to her face : nor was she very likely to meet with any one who would. If any such remark had been made in the hearing of any of her friends who had known her from her infancy, one and all would have stared amazed, and she would have stared the most of all. And so, when her divine cousin went away with her grand friend, Marie was quite content to stay at home with her father and her little brother and sister—to find all her serious occupation in mending, washing, and suchlike pursuits—and to

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look for her whole amusement in strumming on the old harpsichord, and in taking gossiping walks with Laura Warden, the Doctor's daughter, who, poor girl, was plain, stupid, and uninteresting in an absolute and positive sense. It was this Laura Warden who, with her brother Mark, had been Marie's early and only playmates. Hers was indeed a dull, poor, stupid life: it scarcely contained sufficient material to feed even a quiet spirit that dreamed of nothing more.

In the course of one of these walks of theirs, the two girls, having been as far as the lodge-gates of Earl's Dene, were strolling homeward by the banks of the Grayl. It was the close of a summer day, and the country had reached the second stage of its beauty.

The Doctor's daughter was in reality the younger of the two, but she did not look so. She was not very unlike, for a girl, what her father had been in his younger days, except that, instead of being tall and stout, she was short and only inclined to be stout. In other respects she had no particular figure to speak of—a round, more than rosy face, short turn-up nose, blue-grey eyes, and light curly hair. Even as the Doctor had been considered rather a handsome man by the women of Denethorp, so was she

considered a pretty girl by its men. Altogether, she looked like a good-humoured country girl: and her dress was rather fine, rather slatternly, and wholly unfashionable. Marie, on the other hand, though she looked little more than a child, had in reality arrived at the advanced age of eighteen years. Her figure was neither short nor tall, but was elegant in its carriage, and that of a lady, without being so graceful as to be remarkable. Her face, which was rather of the square order, and somewhat Flemish in its complexion and contour, wore an habitual smile that was rather sweet than bright. Her dress, like that of her companion, had but little to do with any of the fashions of the last four years: but it was in as good taste as can well be contrived with a purse narrow to the last extreme. They were certainly not a distinguished-looking pair, and would not have received a second look from any ordinary pair of eyes.

The one chattered, the other listened: and, as a matter of course, the chatter had a great deal to do with "He."

"What do you think, Marie? Don't you think He is very ugly?"

"Really I haven't noticed. No—not so very."

"What a girl you are! You never notice anybody, I think."

"Oh yes, I do."

"Come, don't pretend. I'm sure Mr Brown looked your way at church. I saw him."

"That can hardly be, Lorry, when I don't go to church."

"Oh, I forgot you were a Dissenter. Then of course he couldn't have."

"A Catholic, Lorry."

"Oh, it's all the same. I suppose it was at Mrs Price's girls, then."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"La, Marie, how provoking you are!"

"Why?"

"Because you are. I'm sure I wouldn't look at him for the world. He's not so good-looking as that comes to. Would I?"

"I don't see why you shouldn't, if you like."

"I think even Mark's better looking — don't you?"

"Than Mr Brown?"

"Of course — who else? Oh, Marie! look — there's a water-rat! I'd throw something at him if I had it."

"Is that because of his colour, Lorry?"

"How you do go on about Mr Brown!" replied Laura, with delightful injustice.

"And pray who is Mr Brown?" suddenly asked a voice behind them. "I shall be jealous if you don't take care: and then——"

Miss Laura started and turned round. "La, Mark, how you do make one jump, to be sure!" she exclaimed. Marie held out her hand, with just a little more colour in her face than before.

Not that either had the least reason to be alarmed. Mark Warden was only a manly-looking boy of an uncomfortable age, with little remarkable about him except that he was singularly unlike his sister, and that the want of likeness was entirely in his favour: for he was tall and lank, with a thin pale face, square forehead, straight nose, strong thin lips, and sharp decided grey eyes, which were just now lit up triumphantly.

"You didn't expect to meet me, you two?" he asked. "I've got some news. Guess."

"Oh, do tell us!" exclaimed Lorry.

"You see before you, young ladies, a scholar of St Margaret's College, Cambridge."

"La, Mark, what in the world's that?"

"It means some one that'll be a Fellow of St Margaret's one of these days—perhaps a bishop! What do you say to that?"

"Oh, Mark, what *do* you mean?"

So then he explained to them both his great success, with that glowing flow of spirit that is born from no success in life but the first. Both the girls caught, each in her own different way, the contagion of his triumph: and both to the full shared his interest in the immediate fact that he was no longer a schoolboy, and would be a full-blown Cambridge man in October.

"And the young squire'll be there too, I hear say," said Lorry, who was as much impressed by the fact that her brother would be with the young squire as by any part of the story.

Mark looked contemptuous, but smiled, for this meant something to him also. He did not explain to them the difference between a scholar and a fellow-commoner.

To be no longer a schoolboy! That in itself is a great thing: it is to feel that one is really a man—to feel it much more strongly, alas! than when manhood does really come, and one finds out how little it means after all. Mark at this moment had the sensation of being a new creature altogether, and he looked at the outside world with altogether new eyes. He even found out already, for instance, that feminine sympathy was a pleasant thing, especially when it flowed from one who

was not his sister. Possibly it was some unconscious instinctive feeling that this was so with him that had called up the shadow of a blush upon the cheek of Marie on meeting her old tyrant and playfellow.

Besides, Mark Warden had always been, not only her tyrant, but her hero—not an unusual combination, by the way. She was by nature prone to hero-worship, and, next to her cousin, the Doctor's son held the highest place in her little social pantheon. She naturally, and as a matter of course, admired most in others the strength and talent in which she was supposed, and supposed herself, to have no part. Now Mark Warden was not a boy of the most ordinary sort, although there are plenty of boys like him. What his character became when fully formed will appear in due course. But at present it may be said that he apparently inherited but few of his father's qualities. The Doctor used to say of his son, with pride, "Look at my son Mark: there's an old head on young shoulders for you!" His schoolfellows set him down as being a prig, and his masters held him up as the model boy, alike in point of character, of industry, and of talent. But his father, his schoolfellows, and his masters were all wrong. In such a matter the

instinct of a girl, however young she may be, is infallible: and no young girl ever admires an old head on young shoulders, a prig, or a model boy. It is of the nature of a Sophia to hate a Master Bliffl. In point of fact the head of Mark was to the full as young as his shoulders, and was filled, besides, with all sorts of impossible dreams: he had no real love of books: he cared not a straw for the good opinion of anybody: his talent was not brilliant: and his freedom from scrapes was simply the result of his industry, which itself was utterly against the grain of his nature.

Does this sound inconsistent? If so, it is not because it was really so. The square brow and the strong mouth, so early developed, were sure signs that the boy, young as he was, was capable of forming a purpose, and of resolutely keeping to it when it was formed. Every large school contains some such boys, though of course in an inconsiderable minority.

Now Mark, like most whom nature has rendered fit to do something in the 'world, was a born dreamer: and as he strolled with his rod and line along the Grayl and through the park of Earl's Dene, he felt to the full that discontent with his lot in life which every professional dreamer knows

so well. His own position, his own prospects, were poor enough. His father, now that Denethorp had grown in size and in consequence, no longer in his own person represented the colleges of surgeons and physicians. The Doctor had at first flourished simply because he had had the whole field to himself: for, as may have been gathered already, he had no qualities that render success superior to accident. It is not necessary, indeed, that a country surgeon should possess the suavity and polished manners so essential to the well-doing of his *confrère* of the city. A certain roughness and bluntness is in by no means ungraceful keeping with the character: but then, if he has them not, he must have something better. Now, while the ladies of the place, who no longer consisted of his old admirers, but to a great extent of strangers whom the mills had gathered together from various parts of the country, were disgusted with his loud and what they considered vulgar manners—for the ladies of the mills were mightily particular on the score of vulgarity—with his utter want of tact, and with the flavours of tobacco and spirits from which he was now seldom free, their husbands found out that, good fellow as he certainly was in the smoking-room and hunting-field, he was never to be

found when wanted, that he took no personal interest in his cases, that he never kept an appointment with anything like punctuality, and that, from carelessness, though not from dishonesty, there was always something wrong about his bills. Besides these easily perceptible defects, his skill was not extraordinary, and his knowledge behind the time: for he never read, and saw no practice but his own, from one year's end to the other. Perhaps, on the whole, he did not kill quite so many patients as either of his two rivals, but then he certainly allowed a great many more to die.

The result of this state of things will readily be imagined: and Mark could not help comparing himself with the heir of Earl's Dene, for instance, who was scarcely so old as he, and who was yet, for no reason that his dissatisfied mind could find out, a spoiled favourite of fortune. Gradually and unconsciously, as with many another boy of lower birth and worse prospects, the idea of one day becoming rich and great became part of his very nature, and this, in due course, grew from being an unconscious idea to be a set, conscious purpose. By the time he was fourteen he had even chosen the means. These suggested themselves to him in a sudden flash, as it were, when he happened once

to be in Redchester at assize time, and was told that the judge whom he saw sitting in scarlet and ermine, and heard addressed as "my lord," was now a peer of the realm, but had once swept out a shop in a country town. So he made up his mind to become a barrister—not quite so easy a step to take in those days as in these. But, for him, the best road to the bar was through a college-fellowship—his only road to the university was a scholarship—and to gain that he must work hard at school. And so he did set himself to work hard, and thus gained his first step towards the Woolsack.

But also, like most dreamers, he was reserved. He kept his schemes locked in his own breast, not because he was afraid of ridicule, but because it was simply not his nature to make confidences. Indeed, to a certain extent, he was in the same position as Marie. There was no one about him capable of giving him sympathy, far less of aiding or directing him. His father was proud, and his sister fond, of him: but he was outside, if not above, them both, and he knew it, exaggerating the distance with the conceit of his age and nature. And thus it was that, unamiable as his character may be thought, it was quite strong enough to

gain the admiration of the strength-worshipping Marie.

III.

Above all things, however, let it be remembered that he was, after all, but eighteen, and that a few months of comparative idleness, after many months' very hard work, were now before him.

These two facts lead to the very germ whence this story springs.

In the very first paragraph of the first part of this introduction to it, the reader received a warning. That warning is repeated here, because, in spite of what people profess, they are, in fact, perpetually craving after complete consistency of character, and are disappointed when they do not find it. Of course, verbally, and as an abstract proposition, everybody is always quite ready to admit that there is no such thing in the world, except, just possibly, in the case of consistent stupidity and consistent obstinacy. But this creed is not held so practically as its orthodoxy deserves.

It will doubtless be gathered from this solemn opening, that the resolute and practical Mark Warden, with a by no means impossible dream of the

enforced celibacy of a fellowship before him, fell under the influence of an altogether inconsistent dream, and that he indulged both these dreams simultaneously. In point of fact, youth and leisure, and sudden freedom from the fetters of hard work, are fully sufficient to account for this. But, unhappily, tellers of stories have, for the most part, combined to treat the conscious wish to marry for love as a proof of youthful unworldliness and want of practicalness of character. In reality it is not a proof of anything whatever. On the contrary, the most worldly, the most prudent, the most practical, are just as likely to make absurd and imprudent marriages for love as their neighbours.

In short, there is scarcely anything that a man may not do, however inconsistent it may be with his general character, without in the least offending against the laws even of common probability. David betrays Uriah, and yet remains the most pious of men: Hector runs away at the mere sight of Achilles, and yet remains the bravest: Nero cannot find it in his heart to sign an ordinary death-warrant, and yet remains the most cruel: Napoleon marries his first empress for love, and yet remains the most heartless. And so, to compare very great things with very small, Mark Warden spends his holiday in falling in love

with his sister's friend, without ceasing to be as ambitious, as practical, and as prudent as ever.

But more than this. When a self-willed and practical boy has made up his mind that he is in love with a woman, he is far more likely to attempt to push matters to their extreme point than if he were older, or were of a romantic and sentimental nature. And yet it must not be thought from this that the reader is going to be called upon to swallow such a monstrous notion as that one of Mark Warden's character should, even for love's sake, throw up his chances and projects, and at once burden himself with a penniless wife and her relations. However inconsistent men may be, and are, that would be too absurd.

Nevertheless, if all this is borne in mind, and if it is also remembered that, with a great amount of self-will and a strong disposition to self-indulgence—all the stronger because it was kept under restraint—Mark Warden had always taken care to be clear of all scrapes, and to be on the safe side: that, with a determination to do everything that he wished to do, whether the object were prudent or no, he invariably chose the most prudent means of doing it; that he had quite made up his mind to become a fellow of his college and make Marie his wife: and if, besides

this, are borne in mind the nature and disposition of Marie—her entire subjection to Mark, her intense belief in him, her complete want of any one to whom she might look for advice and rational sympathy—then it will be easy enough to account for what took place before the beginning of the October in which his freshman's term was to begin.

It is presumably unnecessary to go step by step through the whole history of Mark Warden's first love. In its outward progress, no love-affair of boy and girl could be more natural or free from any but the most ordinary excitement. So delicate, intangible, and, for the most part, so unimpassioned a subject as first love, hardly falls within the coarse grasp of prose. Its very nature abhors the minute elaboration rendered necessary by any attempt to confine its subtle spirit in the bonds of definite words and regular sentences. But still, in this particular case, there were some peculiarities that demand notice.

Now of first love there are two kinds. The first is of that kind which may be called calf-love *par excellence*, when a very young man idly fancies himself in love with the first woman outside his own familiar circle who comes to hand, be she old or young, fair or foul, marchioness or milliner: this

dies out as soon as the lover has seen a second. But there is another kind, which is as strong as love's later growths, and even stronger. The first kind is almost invariably absurd. Ten to one the lady is utterly unsuited to her adorer in respect of character, position, age—in short, of everything: and a hundred to one she laughs at him into the bargain. When, however, it happens, as it does sometimes, that the love is only a development of long standing and affectionate acquaintance on both sides: when age, character, and position are all as they should be: when the girl looks up to instead of down upon her lover: and when the latter, though a boy in years, has the power of forming fixed resolves: then, though he will very probably fall out of love again, still, while he is in love, he does not love in play. Men, after all, fall out of love fully as often as boys: so that first and last love may sometimes be much the same thing in every respect.

It very seldom happens that one so young as Mark was now finds himself really looked up to by any girl or woman outside his own family. The peculiarity of his position in this respect was in itself more than enough to flatter the vanity, which he held in common with all mankind, into a very good imitation of love, even had other circumstances not brought about

something much more than a mere imitation of it. There was certainly no doubt that he was now Marie's hero more than ever. As his self-confidence increased, so did her diffidence. And this feeling of hers, absurd in itself, was not altogether unreasonable by comparison. She, having seen nothing of the world, could only judge what it and its inhabitants were like from her experience of Denethorp: and she was quite right in thinking that her lover, intellectually speaking, was the best man in the place. And then, when he who was her hero told her that he loved her—her, the plain and stupid Marie—the surprise of her sudden glory was enough in itself to make her whole soul overflow in return.

To wish for a thing, and to try to get it at once, are with the Mark Wardens of the world one and the same thing. They do not care for the pleasures of anticipation, and revel in *coups de main*. And so, with him, to wait for the end when he could seize it without having to wait for it, was simply out of the question. But then his coming college career—what was he to do? Of giving up that, especially after his recent success, he was just as incapable as of waiting for Marie. Ambition and impatient love were fairly at war.

Meanwhile the days and weeks slipped by with

that rapidity of flight that belongs to all things in that magical world in which both were now living. Marie developed wonderfully and in many ways under this new and strange influence. Life had come to mean something now beyond a round of mending and washing, and walking with her friend : and the whole of life was absorbed in pride and happiness.

Generally speaking, a girl of seventeen is far older than a boy of eighteen—but it was not so in this case : and instead of being mistress of the situation, she was only too willing to deliver up her whole self into his hands if he required it. Indeed, had she been less innocent than she was, the position would have been full of extreme danger for her. The relation between lovers is almost invariably of much the same character as that which holds between a tyrant and a slave, either one way or the other : and, in this case, Marie was certainly not the tyrant. Mark could not even quarrel with her : he could not even invent the smallest cause for imaginary jealousy. If the vacation had lasted much longer, his happiness must have inevitably become tame : and Marie, to whom up to the end it was nothing but a period of the wildest and most intense excitement, would never have dreamed of keeping him up to the proper fever-

heat by such artificial means as women for the most part know so well how to use.

But the vacation flew by only too quickly for both: and it was fated that before it was over she was to pass through a period of excitement indeed.

One day her impatient tyrant asked her to marry him—to marry him before the beginning of his approaching three years' absence, and to marry him secretly. He was, of course, not wholly open as to his motives for making this proposal, even to himself. But he was wholly honest in what he did say. He laid before her his great love for her: he told her how upon her depended, as he sincerely felt, the whole of his happiness: how, in fact, he *must* marry her at once—an illogical but always a most powerful argument in such cases: how, on the other hand, all his prospects in life depended upon his success at college: how he should, as he fully believed, do nothing there unless his mind and heart were at ease: how, if he felt that it was for his wife he was working, he should do everything in the world: and, lastly, how all his fine prospects would be ruined should their marriage be known to others before the end of at least three years. In a word, he argued, she would destroy him if she refused to marry him at once, and ruin him if she did not marry him

secretly. Of course he urged all this in a far more lover-like manner : but this is what it all came to.

Not only was Marie singularly poor in friends, but if she had had troops of them, their united opinion would not have weighed a feather, or rather a tuft of down, against the wish of Mark. Besides, the proposal itself was made, as it were, under the seal of confession. Still she could not help feeling, in spite of her ignorance of the world's ways, that somehow she had been asked to do what was not right. She would have been content to wait for twenty years—why should not he? And so, almost to his anger, she did for once show very nearly the spirit of a mouse, and gained time to think.

But even so does the mouse gain time to think when the cat suffers her for a moment to get a few inches away from his inevitable claws. Marie did think, or rather fancied that she thought : and this was what all her thinking came to.

Self-denial was with her a habit. To please any one she loved she would willingly have jumped from the top of the church-tower : to save her lover there was absolutely nothing that she would not have done. Every word that he, in his wisdom, had said to her, she believed implicitly. How or why should she not? And she could not, when she came to reason,

seriously think that what he wished her to do could be really wrong. If to do what he asked her involved self-sacrifice, why, so much the better. And then, after all, to conceal what she meant to do from others would cost no effort and no shame. Her shyness, beyond the surface of which no eye but his had cared to penetrate, had grown into an artificial reserve that was none the less a part of her now for having but little to do with her real nature. No one ever caring to know her thoughts and feelings, she had acquired a habit of not telling them: and as no one ever asked her questions about what she did or where she went, she naturally assumed that no one cared. Though not self-confident she was self-sufficing: and so in this matter too, she, as a matter of course, followed the advice of her own heart.

As to how and where the ceremony that was to make them husband and wife was to be performed, there was but little real difficulty. Mark Warden was not likely to be conquered by mere details.

In Denethorp secrecy would have been impossible, and but little less so in Redchester. But in the neighbouring county, some thirty miles away, was the large and important city of B——, where a man might do many more difficult things than getting married without a soul being the wiser. Mark

Warden, some few weeks before the beginning of the Cambridge term, found out that he wanted a tutor for mathematics. He told his father so, who, as usual, thought that whatever his son did was all right, and who, in fact, never thought of actively interfering with his children so long as what they wanted to do did not interfere with his own momentary comfort. He therefore scarcely listened when Mark went on to say that he must find the required help at B——. Indeed he would have been much more interested had he been told that it was likely to be a wet day. As to expense, the scholarship was henceforth to cover everything for ever. He happened to have a little money by him just then : and so he gave his son a few guineas, on a sort of semi-understanding that he was never to be asked for any money again, and, if the truth were known, was not very much grieved when the house was left once more to himself and Lorry : for Mark had come to take not over-kindly to his shiftless ways and acquaintances of the bar parlour. So the future Fellow of St Margaret's went to stay for a while in B——, and in the beginning of October, when all was arranged, sent Marie enough money to bring her there too.

Then, it is true, she felt frightened at what she was going to do : and she would have given anything

to have been able to draw back. But it was certainly too late now. So, with much sinking at the heart and much confusion, she made a half-true excuse for going over to Redchester. Thence she reached B—— in the forenoon: and from B—— she returned home the very same evening.

Of course they had, to say the least of it, been guilty of a desperate piece of folly. But enough has now been said to show that, under the circumstances, their folly was not only natural, but almost a necessary consequence of their respective characters, and of the relation in which they respectively stood to each other and to those about them.

When the next morning came, Marie found herself half proud, half frightened, to think that she was now a wife—at least in law and in name: for what being a wife means she knew no more now than two days ago. Her first unconscious feeling, when she woke, was one of wonder that the world had not come to an end. She almost thought that she must have been dreaming: and she almost anxiously felt under her pillow for the ring that she was not allowed to wear. But in spite of the secret that filled her heart, the feeling with which she met her father was neither of fear nor of shame. Mark would be a great man one of these days: and, like the

child she was, she looked forward to telling her father the news, when the time came to tell it, as a pleasant surprise. Her only really uncomfortable thought was, that she was not allowed to tell her friend Laura that they had become sisters. She was certainly terribly innocent.

But if her innocence had caused her to commit a great error, it had also stood her in good stead. After all,

“The surest panoply is innocence :”

and so it had been with her.

In a day or two her husband in name and in law returned, and a day or two after that, he came to bid her good-bye. It was a real parting : for at that time to go to Cambridge from so distant a place as Dene-thorp did not mean, at least in the case of a poor man who really intended to devote himself to the work of the place, to be absent for a few weeks at a time, and then to come home for weeks or months. It meant with Mark an almost unbroken absence of three years.

To him, with all his ambition and hope, the parting was full of pain. To her it meant almost desolation. But there was no help for it : and at the last moment, as he passed her window on his way

to the coach, she bravely held back her tears for a moment in order that she might give him a smile of hope and encouragement, which made his old purpose seem faint indeed. He felt that to make her happy, and not himself great, must be his purpose now.

So much at present for these. Meanwhile it must not be forgotten that there was such a person in the world of Denethorp as Miss Clare of Earl's Dene: and this must be more especially borne in mind, as she was now, in fact, Denethorp's great lady.

With her earlier life, as has already appeared, her Denethorp subjects were not very familiar. Her mother had died soon after giving her birth, and she had been almost constantly in London with her father, and scarcely ever at her country home, for which, being a man of pleasure and politics, he had no taste. It was generally supposed that she had refused countless offers of marriage from countless suitors, who were attracted by her wealth or beauty, or both: and it was known that at about the age of four-and-twenty she had gone abroad with her aunt, a Mrs Lester, whose husband was something in the diplomatic service. After some years she returned home again, and then both her father and herself took up their residence at Earl's Dene, where, very

soon afterwards, Mr Clare died.. She was his only child and sole heir: and by the time that she came to the property, all her vague reputation for "oddness" had entirely passed away. She was a great lady: and she evidently intended to play out her *rôle* of great lady to the fullest extent. So successfully did she carry out her intention, that she very soon became regarded with an almost awful reverence by all within reach of her influence, and with rebellious dislike by those with whom she, as a stanch Tory and High Church woman, had long declared open war—that is to say, by the reformers of the cloth-mills and the growing body of Dissenters. To those who acknowledged her authority she was generous and even kind; but to those who did not, she was certainly not kind, and could be very often ungenerous. She was, in fact, endowed with no little of that political asperity which has been said by a great politician to be as unbecoming to a woman as a beard. Her views about Church and State were both decided and practical, and, like the lady in Molière, what she wished she wished furiously.

But certainly these present views of hers would have desperately astonished those persons who remembered her youth, not in Denethorp, but in London, where it had been principally passed.

These, too, had considered her odd, and with reason.

Nature had given her, besides her beautiful person, a precocious intelligence, an energetic mind, strong passions, quick feelings, a most excitable imagination, and an amount of obstinacy that, in so young a woman, was perfectly appalling. Circumstance and education had given these dangerous qualities a peculiar direction. The times in which she lived were peculiar, and she was, from her cradle, wrapped round in an atmosphere of politics. Her father lived for politics. In the circle in which he moved nothing but politics was talked from morning till night. Politics formed her whole idea of life and society. Being singularly impressible, and only too ready to take an active interest in anything that was brought before her notice, she caught the contagion fully. But, unhappily, hers was one of those minds that are never satisfied unless they are in chronic opposition to the general or predominant views taken by the world in which they move. Of course, this love of opposition for its own sake is anything but uncommon. But, while the Lydia Languishes of her age and acquaintance were dreaming of romantic elopements with impecunious ensigns simply because their friends

wished them to marry sensibly and to be well off in the world, she was bent upon saying and doing things that made everybody stare, simply because her friends wished her to live the life of a conventional fine lady, and either not to think for herself at all, or else to think as she was told. It was certainly not that she in reality liked being a fine lady less, but that she loved opposition more. Had she been a woman of real genius or genuine independence of character, she would very likely have made a name for herself: but, as it was, she only got called names by the society in which she lived, which could not comprehend how an English girl of good family could even play at holding such strange and revolutionary notions as hers.

The truth was that, considering her character, there was nothing more strange in her holding these notions than there would have been in her holding the very opposite, had circumstances been different. She was simply wild, romantic in her own way, and ambitious of notoriety. Had her father and his set been the friends of Mr Fox, she would on the same principle, and with no more reason, have called herself a Tory of the extremest sort: but, as he and his friends were steady supporters of the Cabinet of that day, she was bound, in order to be

in her natural state of opposition, to take up with the other extreme. Not only so, but her natural tendency to eccentricity, which, in her childhood, had led her to scorn dolls and to rebel against needle-work, caused her, when she grew up, to affect a learned and philosophical contempt for the usual amusements and pursuits of her age and station. Her heroes were Washington and Lafayette: her authors, Godwin and Rousseau. She scribbled a little herself, both in wild prose and vapid verse, and even carried her speculations into regions to which a young and unmarried woman is generally supposed not to possess the key. As may easily be imagined, her father—who never had time to see very much of her, who was quite unable to control her, and who could not in the least understand her, partly, no doubt, because the greater share of her obstinacy was a part of her inheritance—was terribly annoyed, and even alarmed. It was certainly not a pleasant thing for him to hear the arguments of the "Political Justice" retailed openly at the head of his table before Cabinet Ministers, and those of the "Natural History of Religion" before Bishops. He made the grave mistake of fancying that she might make a final display of her strange form of romance by perhaps running off

with some democratic adventurer, just to prove her belief in the doctrine of universal equality—that she might do worse than marry a penniless ensign, even if she cared to go through the ceremony of marriage at all. Of course, in fancying any such thing he only showed how little he understood her real character. Her republican ideas did not in the least affect her family pride, which was greater than his own. But the mistake, under the circumstances, was not unnatural: and he was accordingly only too delighted when, after many unpleasant domestic scenes, his wife's sister, Mrs Lester, offered, for a time, to relieve him of this *enfant terrible*.

But, as has been said already, they became good friends again before he died: and woe now to any one who, in her presence, should drop a slighting word even of my Lord Castlereagh. Her opinions had changed, but not her nature. Nevertheless, with all her politics and all her narrowness, she was a very good woman in her way. She tried with all her strength to do what she thought was right, and she hated with all her soul what she thought was wrong. Doubtless she would have been a better woman still—better, at least, as a woman—had it been her lot to have had children of her own upon whom to expend some of the spare energy of her

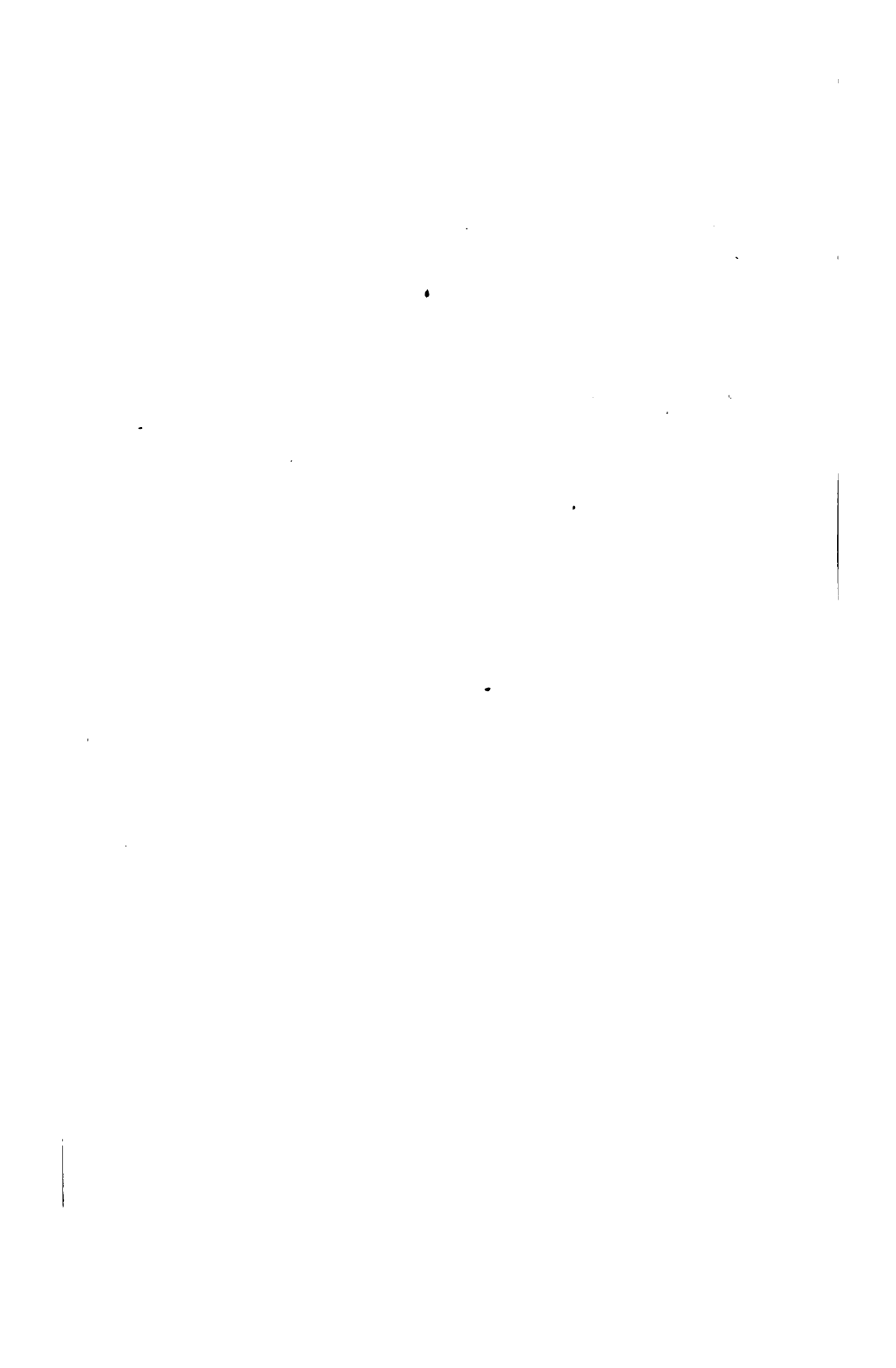
nature. She had, to a great extent, endeavoured to supply the want by adopting, not only as her heir, but as her son, the orphan grandchild of Mrs Lester, who was now, like Mark Warden, about to proceed to Cambridge.

Certainly in every material sense the chosen heir of Earl's Dene was to be accounted one of fortune's favourites. With whatever faults or drawbacks it might have—for nothing is quite perfect—no finer place, no better estate, could well be found, out of the hands of the peerage, in all England. If, in addition to the enjoyment of its real advantages, its owner should take a fancy to have a handle to his name, he would have but to ask and to obtain. Indeed it was rather a matter of surprise in the neighbourhood that the late owner had not done so. The artist could admire it for its beauty, the sportsman for the capabilities for sport of every sort and kind that it afforded, the politician for the member that it had as a matter of course sent to the House of Commons ever since the days of the Earls of Wendale, and everybody for the productiveness of the land and its complete freedom from serious encumbrances. But to the angler especially, who had spent a long summer day by the Grayl, and who then, after sauntering past the deer in the

Lodge Park up the long avenue, and round the walks of the flower-garden, whose fragrance was such as belongs to those gardens only that have been mellowed by time and filled with the sweet memories of many generations of fruits and flowers, had been privileged to crown his day with the nobler fragrance of the claret, for which the cellars of Earl's Dene, in spite of frequent feminine rule, were renowned far and wide, the place would indeed seem to be a true province of the earthly paradise into which no trouble might come. And now it is time that its story should fairly begin.

BOOK I.—ANGÉLIQUE

CONTAINING THE EVENTS OF FIVE WEEK



CHAPTER I.

It was a soft and fine June evening in the year 181—, so wonderfully soft and fine, indeed, that it was the very type of what an evening ought to be in that best of months. And yet, strange to say, although the inside of the coach that passed through Denethorp every day was full, there were no more than three of its passengers who preferred to closeness and confinement the sweetness and fragrance of the open air. Of these “outsides,” one had come the whole distance from London, another had joined the coach some three or four stages off, and the third had mounted to his seat in the after part while the horses were being changed at Redchester. The latter was absorbed in conversation with the guard about the affairs of the road, the occupant of the box-seat was sound asleep, while the passenger who sat immediately behind was wrapped in a meditation that rendered him as blind to what lay to left

and right as if his eyes also had been closed. Presently, however, the sleeper slowly opened his, gave a good long stretching yawn, and then, having satisfied himself as to the point of the journey at which he and his fellow-passengers had arrived, turned round to take a survey of his temporary companions, in the course of which his eyes at once encountered those of his rear-rank man. The faces of both brightened into recognition as they exclaimed simultaneously,—

“Lester!”

“Warden! why, where do you fall from?”

Both were young men of nearly the same age, which was apparently about two-and-twenty, more or less: but, in every other respect, they were different enough.

The occupant of the box-seat—he who had been addressed as Lester—would at once, and under any circumstances, have been set down as an uncommonly good-looking fellow, not only by women, but by men also. Nor was he good-looking only in the sense of having regular features, a healthy complexion, a good figure, and an exceedingly pleasant expression, but in the far more important sense of being firmly and strongly made, without any undue preponderance of one pair of limbs or of one set of

muscles over another: in the sense of looking as though he could hold his own in all manly exercises that became a gentleman. Although he had been sleeping in an extremely cramped and uncomfortable position, yet, when he roused himself, he was wide awake at once: and the ring of his voice as he spoke seemed to show that he had fallen asleep not from weariness, but from the want of something better to do.

The other, whom he had called Warden, was also sufficiently good-looking, but after a far less healthy and less animal style. His features were far less regular, and his complexion far more pale: his lips were thinner and firmer, and his eyes more deeply set: and while the forehead of Lester was without a fold, his brow, less open, bore the presage of that kind of frown that is caused by the constant exercise of the brain. In point of figure, though there was about him no apparent want of bodily strength, those who have an eye for such matters would have said that whatever power he possessed was nervous rather than muscular: and he by no means shared with his acquaintance the signs of being practised in outdoor pursuits. In spite of their nearness to each other in point of age, there was much of the same sort of difference between them that is supposed to

distinguish the townsman from the countryman, and the man who neglects the body for the sake of the mind, from him who neglects the mind for the sake of the body. And yet it is almost unfair to both of them to say this: for Lester, in spite of the regularity of his features, looked anything but empty or stupid—his eyes were too lively and his lips too ready to smile for that: and Warden certainly did not look as though he had neglected exercise so much as to be without sufficient firmness of muscle for the ordinary needs of a man's life. Still, one was as plainly the young squire as the other was the student: and their voices, too, had this difference, that while Lester's was pleasant and essentially that of a gentleman, it was loud and unrestrained, and that Warden's, while it was clearer, better cultivated, and more subdued, was rather reserved in its tone, and was, besides, not free from a perceptible tinge of provincialism in its accent, though not more than just enough to make one suspect that the social position of the man himself was probably higher than that of his father and mother.

All these physical details were amply perceptible, for the evening was so warm that neither of the young men cared to encumber himself with more wrappings than were absolutely necessary. Indeed,

by a moderately quick eye they might have been noted during the short pause that elapsed before Warden answered,—

“It is odd I did not recognise you when I got up. I joined the coach at Thurleigh. You are bound to Earl’s Dene, I suppose?”

“Yes, I’m bound for the old place. Rather a bore, though, isn’t it, just at this time of year of all others?”

“You come from town, then?”

“I should think so. Where else should a man be just now? I hope my aunt—I always call Miss Clare my aunt, you know—hasn’t called me down for nothing. She’s rather apt to, sometimes. I can’t think what she could want to say to me that she couldn’t write just as well. Where are you from? Cambridge? How long have you been down?”

“Only a day or two. I came nearly straight.”

“And now I suppose you will make some stay in Denethorp? Well, you must come over, and we’ll have a day or two by the Grayl together, or something. By the way I have to congratulate you, haven’t I?”

“Oh, about my fellowship? Thanks.” He did not, however, give the thanks that he expressed

so curtly the advantage of much warmth of manner. Perhaps he fancied that the congratulation had been offered a little too patronisingly: and certainly it had been spoken far too carelessly to suit the ears of one who had achieved a great and tangible success. It was natural for him to forget that, while to himself his brilliantly-won fellowship, the reward of three long years of hard and self-denying study, meant competence and honour for the present, and a sound and strong foundation on which to build the fabric of the future—to the heir of Earl's Dene it could seem nothing more than just a two or three hundred a-year that might be worth a man's taking if it came in his way, but was certainly not worth making a fuss about.

"And don't you congratulate me too?" Lester asked in his turn.

There were plenty of things, Warden thought, on which his companion might reasonably be congratulated. But he said,—

"I would with pleasure, if I knew what upon. Not matrimony?" he added, with a smile.

"Ah, you think I've been caught in town? Not I. I was up to them, I flatter myself. No—I mean on their not having ploughed me, of course. We haven't met since then, have we? You know

the odds were ten to one against the name Lester being in the list at all, and anything you please against my more than scraping through. But I suppose you wranglers and prizemen don't speculate on the chances of the 'poll.' Well, those weren't a bad three years of ours, were they? And yet somehow I was devilish glad when they were over. One did get enough at last of doing the same sort of things over and over again." What would he have said, by the way, had his days been spent like the days of Warden? He might then, indeed, have had reason for his complaint—and yet very likely in that case he would not have made it. "And yet I was sorry too," he went on. "Holloa! here we are at Graylford. Just let me feel the ribbons, Tom. I'll just run you down to the last corner before the bridge. Madam wouldn't like me to drive up to the gates, I suppose." The coachman resigned his throne with a confidence that he certainly would not have shown had he not known his man. "That's it, Tom—and now for a bit of a spirt."

While, guided by the skilful hand of Hugh Lester, the four horses launched out into a fast canter along the smooth and level highroad, Warden, for a few instants, resigned himself to the full enjoy-

ment of that most delightful of all forms of rapid motion of which the now more than half-forgotten pleasures have been too often and too well described to need farther description here. Neither by temperament nor by habit, however, was he capable, for any length of time together, of holding fast the delight of merging self-consciousness and the sense of personal existence in simple physical enjoyment. Besides, he was tired with his journey, for he had been travelling many hours before he joined the coach: and when he had chanced to fall asleep, his slumber had not been so dreamless and so refreshing as that of Lester. He had, too, been rather overworking his brain of late, under the strain of recent competition, so that his nerves were not in the best imaginable order. The result was that, as each spring of the horses brought him nearer and nearer to his home at Denethorp, his mind indulged more and more in those groundless fancies and presentiments that are so familiar to all who return home after a long absence, especially in cases where correspondence has been unfrequent and fragmentary—groundless fancies and ridiculous presentiments of evil which he who indulges them will not own, even to himself, but which are none the less real and none the less disagreeable for all

their groundlessness and all their absurdity. There is a kind of half-formed idea lurking in the breasts of even the least vain among us, that somehow, in our absence, the things and the people that we care about are more likely to go wrong than right: and the excitement of seeing our home and our friends once more is very often due less to our affection for them than to a causeless fear of finding, say, our house burnt to the ground, our children laid up with scarlet fever, our servants absconded with the plate, a heap of letters waiting for an answer, and, according to our sex, our wife eloped, or our husband smoking in the drawing-room. It is true that Warden had no children, no plate, and no correspondence: but, in such a case, fancy can find plenty of food on which to feed without any assistance from facts. And then, too, he could not help being vexed with himself that he, a high wrangler, a prizeman, and Chancellor's medalist of his year, and now a Fellow of his College—that he, who had become a sort of lion in his own set, and had thereby come to feel as though he had already done something and become somebody in the world—that he, who was all this and had done all this, and who was expected by all his friends, as well as by himself, to be and to do a

very great deal more in a few years' time—should have, somehow or other, been forced to feel now that he had not been able to meet, on at least terms of equality, a man like Lester, upon whom, with all the vanity of his age, he thought himself entitled to look down as from an infinite height of intellectual superiority. He was naturally imbued with the common and intelligible but profoundly dangerous and often fatal error, that mental superiority is worth more than a single straw in the ordinary social intercourse between man and man: an error to which, whatever the case may be now, clever and successful university men used at all events to be peculiarly liable, and from which, unless they afterwards mixed freely and largely with various classes of society, they were very often unable to shake themselves free. Warden was now, in fact, receiving his first lesson in this matter. At every step of the road that took him farther from Cambridge and nearer to Dene-thorp, his superiority to Lester seemed to fade away more and more rapidly, while the only distinction between them that would be recognised in the county became distinct in proportion. He could not help being aware that he was becoming once more degraded to the position that belonged to

him in his native town as the son of an obscure and struggling country doctor, while Lester, in a like manner, was rising to his full rank as heir of Earl's Dene. The utterly different kind of life necessarily led by the two while both were at Cambridge, and their different social station even there, had not allowed their slight acquaintance to develop into anything more than slight acquaintance: so that no habits of familiar intercourse had tended to bridge over this old gap between them, which seemed to Warden's eyes to be wider than ever, now that he was of an age and in a position to perceive more clearly its breadth and its nature. Indeed to a certain extent this feeling of his was altogether new. In the old times he had always, like the rest of the world of Denethorp, been ready enough to pay all due deference to the young squire, whose occasional kindly notice he had been proud to receive: but that was while he was as yet nothing but the struggling student, with his way in life yet to begin. Now, on the contrary, he could not persuade himself that it was becoming on the part of the successful student, with a future of infinite possibilities opening before him, to accept with the same kind of deference the patronage of his intellectual inferior; and so he felt inclined to

be angry with himself for not being able to assert his equality, and for having, from force of old habit, relapsed against his will into his old way of regarding the local supremacy of the Clares and all that belonged to them.

In spite, however, of this vague disquietude of spirit, still the smooth rapidity of the pace, his fatigue, the aimless wandering of his thoughts, and the warm stillness of the air, had nearly succeeded in sending him to sleep in reality when the bugle of the guard sounded, as was the invariable practice when the mail arrived within sight of the long and magnificent avenue of beech-trees that led up through the park from the highroad. Lester rapidly gave up the reins to their rightful holder, and once more sank to the level of a mere passenger.

"That was a pretty fair run, wasn't it, Warden?" he asked, as he began to collect his coats, sticks, and other miscellaneous small articles preparatory to leaving the coach. "Well, old fellow, as I suppose we are to be neighbours for some days, at any rate—how long do you stay at Denethorp?"

"I don't know quite what my movements are for the present, but I don't suppose I shall be off again in a very great hurry."

"How do you think of spending the Long? I

beg its pardon: one must say the autumn, now we have both done with longs and shorts?"

"But I have not done with longs and shorts. I shall be up again next term, I expect. I have got a pupil or two, you know: and I have some idea of getting some men to read with in the Long."

"By Jove! then I have a first-rate notion. Bring your men down here, if they're decent fellows—it's quiet enough. Only mind you get a decent team, and I'll do what I can for them, you know. You shall coach them in Homer and Euclid and all that, and I'll see after their other lines and angles. You can't say I'm a bad coach, after that spirt. Tom, here, shall give me a testimonial. But here we are, I'm always glad to look up the beeches again, though it is a bore to come down just now. Good-bye, Warden—we'll see how the trout lie before many hours are over. So look me up."

"You're very good—I shall be delighted. Good-bye."

By this time the coach had stopped at the great iron gates that were flanked by the lodge, and that bore above them the arms of the Clares, with their motto, "*Non solum nomine clarus*." The old woman who acted as portress had run out on hearing the first blast of the bugle, and now stood with a broad

smile of welcome on her face to receive the young squire. In a few seconds more, the horses, freed from the very respectable weight of Lester and his trappings, were again on their way.

Almost as soon as he was left to himself, Warden forgot the shy constraint that the other's presence had caused: and his mind, relieved from the incubus of Earl's Dene and its belongings, soon began to busy itself about more real and personal matters, while his eyes were occupied with recognising each particular point of the road which he had not travelled for so long: but, as will be remembered, the remainder of the journey was extremely short in respect of both time and distance. Indeed the tower of Denethorp Church was plainly visible, and when the wind was in the right quarter, its peal of bells was often audible from the lodge-gate: and so, in a very little while, he in his turn was descending from his seat at the door of the King's Head, and looking at his own not very heavy amount of luggage. Then, leaving his portmanteau to be sent after him from the inn, the new Fellow of St Margaret's walked across the market-place and down one of the principal streets until he came to a brick house standing in a small garden at the edge of the town, the door of which bore a tarnished brass plate inscribed with the name of Mr Warden, surgeon.

CHAPTER II.

To return, however, to him who was certainly the more important personage of the two in the eyes of the world, if not in those of his travelling companion.

The traveller whose destination happened to be Earl's Dene would, in those days—and, for that matter, in these days also—pass through the iron gates already mentioned, and then proceed three-quarters of a mile, more or less, along the magnificent avenue, having on his left hand an enclosure called the Lodge Park, which was well stocked with deer, that have not, even now, had to yield their old domain to a more useful if less picturesque generation of sheep, until he arrived at the lawn and circular carriage-drive in front of the house itself. This was a plain square building of dark-red brick, pierced with many windows symmetrically arranged in even rows, and altogether of a far more modern appear-

ance than the park and grounds would have led one to expect. The fact is that, while the park is of great antiquity, the house is not older than the hideous reign of George the Second, and bears conspicuously upon its face the date of the memorable year of 1746. It had been built as a substitute for some ruinous ecclesiastical buildings that had cumbered the ground ever since the dissolution of the monasteries. For Earl's Dene had of old been called Abbot's Dene, and had been a sort of offshoot of the great Abbey of Redchester, in the same county, until King Henry made a grant of it to the then Earl of Wendale. Of course, like most of the monastic estates that underwent this fate, its ownership was long looked upon as of necessity associated with the punishment appointed for the sin of sacrilege: and there was a prophetic jingle about it, of which the usual form ran thus:—

“Abbots, Kings, and Earl's Dane,
Never thrice the same again ;”

which is, indeed, rather obscure, but means, according to traditional interpretation, that no family should ever be able to hold it farther than from father to son—that is to say, for more than two generations. As is usual in such cases, for reasons sufficiently familiar to students of popular supersti-

tion, the prophecy was always singularly fulfilled to the letter : but inasmuch as the saying was supposed to be of the nature of a curse, and to prognosticate evil, it had been anything but fulfilled to the spirit. The possessors of Earl's Dene invariably prospered. From the great Earl of Wendale, the original grantee, it passed in due course, when the title became extinct for want of issue male, to his granddaughter, who made a rich and advantageous marriage. From her it again came to a granddaughter : and her grandson changed his name in order to inherit another great estate in another part of England. One more lapse into the female line brought it into the possession of the grandmother, and then of the father, of Madam Clare. Before her grandmother's time the place had been uninhabited and neglected, its owners having always possessed other seats in better repair elsewhere : but Miss Langton, not being in this position, came to live there soon after her marriage, and it was by her and her husband, Colonel Clare, that the present plain but comfortable and convenient house was built. It was by them also that, to the eternal sorrow of antiquaries, the monastic ruins were entirely removed, so that there is scarce left of them so much as a trace to mark the ground on which they once stood.

While Warden was traversing the short distance that lay between Earl's Dene and Denethorp, Lester strolled quietly along the avenue towards the house, wondering what could possibly be the meaning of this sudden and unwelcome summons from Miss Clare—his aunt, as he always called her, although she was really his cousin. In no long time, in spite of his leisurely pace, he had crossed the lawn, passed through the hall, and reached the drawing-room, where Madam Clare, to give her her popular title, was seated in a large arm-chair reading, or sleeping, or both, or neither.

Nothing is so difficult, or rather so impossible, as to say of a man or woman that he or she is absolutely young or old. Youth and age are essentially relative terms. Twenty years are not seldom in reality more than eighty—eighty less than twenty. To resort, however, to the device of calling a person middle-aged is as meaningless a makeshift as to use the term *mezzo-soprano* to describe a voice. It does not in the least say what the person is—it only means that it is impossible to say what he is. Now, about half-way between fifty and sixty is not a great age; and yet Miss Clare certainly looked, and therefore was, old: for a really young woman, whatever the number of her years may be, never looks old. She

was tall, and of a commanding although not upright figure, which was large, but not full: her features, still handsome, were prominent and strongly marked, and wore when, as they were now, in repose, an expression made up of sadness and severity. Her dark eyes had grown dull, and her hair grey. Her complexion was fair, but—what is seldom the case with fair complexions—inclined to be sallow. Her dress was plain, but of costly work and material, the prevailing colour of it being that of lavender. As she rose from her chair to greet her self-styled nephew, and held out to him her white and delicate hand—that only part of a woman that is superior to the effects of time and sorrow—she gave the threefold impression of being a woman who had lived, who had thought, and who was rather to be feared. But this was by no means the only part of her expression, and certainly not the most pleasant part of it. When she spoke her face wonderfully lighted up, and its signs of sorrow and severity were lost in a kind and almost gentle smile, which went far to prove her to be young, after all, and to show that the contrast between her and Lester was to be measured by a standard, not of age, but of power.

“I am glad to see you, Hugh,” she said, in a voice that was grave and pleasant, but rather of the kind

that women acquire together with their Italian calligraphy—that is to say, too conventional, too lady-like, in fact, to express much character.

“I hope there is nothing wrong, aunt, that you called me down?”

“Oh no: but we’ll talk of that presently. I suppose you’re hungry?”

“I certainly shan’t be sorry to get something to eat. You are better, I hope?”

“As well as I can expect to be now. I have been out several times lately. But now, go and have your dinner. I had mine early, as usual. I have no doubt you will find it all ready for you. You will find me here when you have done. By the way, I have a visitor staying with me.”

“Indeed! Any one I know?”

“Well, you do and you don’t.”

“That sounds mysterious, aunt. Is it male or female?”

“For shame, Hugh. It is Miss Raymond, of New Court.”

“What! Alice? By Jove! I wonder what she’s turned out! She ought to be nice, from what I remember when I was a boy.”

Miss Clare smiled. “That is so very long ago, is it not? But you shall see and judge for yourself

when you have had your dinner. I like her very much, but of course that is no reason that you will. Old ladies and young gentlemen don't always agree about those things. Now go and get your dinner."

"How is it she's here? I thought she was out of England."

"So she was, till very lately. But she has come back, and, of course, wanted to look at her own place—her old home, poor girl: so I asked her to stay with me. But now, do go and get your dinner. Miss Raymond will not run away: and, besides, I have something to say to you before I introduce you to your old acquaintance."

But Hugh, hungry as he was, instead of just washing his hands and sitting down at once to the good things provided for him, went to his own room and made a regular evening toilette. He might, he thought, appear before the visitor to the best advantage while he was about it.

At last, however, having amply satisfied his hunger and thirst, he returned to the drawing-room. But Miss Clare was still by herself: so he sat down near her, and disposed himself to listen dutifully to what she had to say.

"You know there's to be a general election, Hugh?"

"I should think so. Nobody is talking of anything else."

"Well, there's to be an opposition in Denethorp."

"In Denethorp! Surely not?"

Well might Hugh Lester stare at the idea of an opposition to Madam Clare in her own town.

"It is only too true," she said.

"But it can't be serious?—it can't succeed?"

"Hugh, the fact is that things are not what they used to be. One can't help seeing it, even here."

"But who would venture——"

"It is these mill-people. Just look at this, and guess where I found it."

She handed him a tract, at which he looked with a puzzled air.

"What is all this, aunt? Is this the 'twopenny trash' that people talk of?"

"You see what it is. But you would never think I found it, not in the hands of a mechanic, but actually in one of my own cottages. You see how this rank poison is spreading. There is a cry of turning out the 'Tory nominee,' as they call our member; and they have set up what they call a Hampden Club under our very eyes."

"But these men are not the voters."

"And in other ways the town is changed. The mills have become a power in the place: and it is that that is at the bottom of it all."

"But who have they got to stand? There's no one in the county——"

"Oh, a man from London—some friend of Sir Francis Burdett and Lord Cochrane, no doubt. But he has money, and that's what they want."

"Do you know who it is?"

"His name is Prescott, they say."

"The devil it is!—I beg your pardon, aunt."

"Do you know anything of him, then?"

"I should think so. He's a great man with all that lot—as well known as any one in town. He's a banker, and as rich as a Jew. He's an awful rascal, I fancy, but tremendously good-looking: and he can talk, too, they say. By Jove! every woman in the place will turn Whig as soon as he's been an hour in it, if all's true I hear. Poor old Tom won't have a chance."

Now "poor old Tom" was a certain Captain Johnston, a harmless old gentleman, who had represented the Clares in Parliament for the last thirty years—who was, in fact, the objectionable "Tory nominee."

"That is just what I think too. I feel that Captain Johnston will be no use to stand a serious con-

test. And so what I wanted to say to you is, that you must come forward yourself."

"My dear aunt!"

"You are of age, you know."

"Why, Prescott would thrash me worse than Johnston."

"Not at all. You are a Clare, you know, in all but the name, and master of Earl's Dene."

This was not bad reasoning. The electors of Dene-thorp might object to be any longer represented by a "warming-pan," as the phrase is: but the heir of Earl's Dene was their representative by nature. Hugh felt the force of the argument at once. He certainly did not enter into Miss Clare's views as to his candidature with much enthusiasm, for he feared, and not without reason, according to common experience, that being in the House would probably be more troublesome than pleasant, and he was not ambitious. But still he did not for a moment dream of combating them. Whatever his private inclinations might be, supposing that he was capable of considering the matter as presenting an alternative, he would feel himself bound, as a gentleman, to do whatever might be expected of him as the future head of a great county family, and as one of the Clares of Earl's Dene. "*Noblesse oblige*." Every great house has its traditions, which are respected and accepted

by its own county, and must be respected and accepted by itself: which, when broken through by some degenerate member of it, crush the apostate with their fragments. The heir of Earl's Dene was far too sensible—if such a word can be used to express what was in reality the result of instinct—not to observe to the full the traditional policy of his family in every essential particular. It would have seemed to him to be treason to act otherwise. And so he submitted to become the candidate for Denethorp with the best grace in the world, and without farther protest—with the same readiness to do what he could to win, and with the same zeal for his side that he was in the habit of bringing to bear upon more congenial contests.

“And now you see,” said Miss Clare, “why I sent for you so suddenly. No time must be lost. Captain Johnston's address is out already, to say he does not mean to stand, and your own is prepared. You must ride over to Denethorp to-morrow and talk to White.”

“What does White think of things?”

“Well, he always speaks candidly to me, and he is not sanguine. But I am. We *must* not be beat, Hugh.”

“And we won't, aunt—not if I can help it.”

“That's right, Hugh. Pluck—I like the word—must win; and no Clare, or Lester either, has ever wanted that.” She sighed, however, as she made her boast.

"I fear it will be pluck against pluck, though, and money against money."

"Then blood will tell."

"But from what you say, London is making itself felt in the place: and there, blood doesn't seem to tell much."

"My dear boy, Earl's Dene will always be as good as London in Denethorp, which is in ——shire, and not in Middlesex."

"Well, I will see White to-morrow, by all means. And don't fear that I won't do all I know."

"Not fearing that, I fear nothing."

"I wish I could speak like Prescott, though."

"Much best not. The best orator is, after all, the man who says nothing but what is in him: and that can always be said in a very few words. You will speak well enough: and, indeed, I think that a gentleman should not speak too well. Speeches are the weapons of demagogues, which a gentleman should scorn. No—I should no more like to see you the match of a man like Mr Prescott, than I should like to think you could use your fists like a prize-fighter. To-morrow you shall tell me all the London news. Now I will introduce you to Miss Raymond. She has been taking a turn on the terrace while I was talking to you. No—don't move: I would rather call her myself."

CHAPTER III.

HUGH rose from his seat, and passed his fingers through his hair.

Miss Raymond entered the drawing-room through the glass door that opened upon the terrace : and her old playmate saw at once that his presentiment had turned out to be right, and that she had turned out something very nice indeed.

But descriptions of people, though they are to a certain extent unavoidable, are always tedious, and never quite satisfactory. No one ever learned to know a person from the best description. And yet, on the other hand, without some amount of personal description, character would be unintelligible altogether. Fortunately, however, Miss Raymond belonged to a large and easily described type. She was young—just of age, according to Miss Clare—and with her tall but well-developed and graceful figure, bright but not too clear complexion, grey hazel eyes,

brown hair, and regular, but not too regular, features, and, best of all, with her bright and open expression and ready smile,—was in appearance all that a young English girl ought to be, and still is sometimes. It need only be added that one who was not an amateur of this style of beauty might, with some reason, have asked for a little more warmth and richness, in expression as well as in colouring. But this is a matter wholly of individual taste. After all, if freshness and purity suggest coldness, it only follows that a certain amount of coldness is not to be despised. It is absurd to quarrel with England, because it has not at the same time both green fields and a southern sun.

“I hope your solitary stroll has not tired you,” said Miss Clare. “Let me introduce my nephew to you—Hugh, you know.”

“I hope Miss Raymond will not need an introduction,” said the latter, politely. “I can assure you, Miss Raymond, that I have not forgotten our old acquaintance, which is, after all, not so excessively old.”

“Nor have I—and I am delighted to renew it.” She had a very sweet voice, with an honest ring about it, as though she used it only to say the whole of what she meant, and never a word less or more.

"And I hope it will not be interrupted for so long again. You have been a great traveller, I hear?"

"Enough at all events to be glad to be home again."

"Which, after all, is the great use of travel, is it not?" said Miss Clare.

And so the three dropped into a pleasant ordinary sort of chat, in which, however, Miss Clare did little but listen. Her nephew—he may as well be called what he was called by everybody—and her guest found plenty to say to one another, for neither was of a silent nature: and Hugh passed altogether a very much more lively evening than he had expected, for, with his out-of-door nature, he could not help finding his aunt's quiet and usually solitary evenings a little wearisome. If he had to give up the rest of the London season, as now seemed probable, the presence of the young lady, he thought, would render his canvass much less dull, especially as she had declared herself to be passionately fond of riding. She was now, he learned, living in London with a distant relation who had been one of her guardians during her minority: but she hated town—so she said, at least—and fully intended that New Court, of which she was mistress in her own right, should for the future see a great deal of her. Altogether their

tastes seemed to match in a most remarkable manner, except with regard to the pleasures of town. Even had he not seen that she was something much better, he would have given her a high place in his good opinion, as "a girl with no nonsense about her."

Was Miss Clare a match-maker? It was not her way to do anything unusual without some definite purpose, and the presence of a guest at Earl's Dene was something very unusual. But Hugh was not given to speculation: and it can only be said that, if she had any plan in her head about him and Alice Raymond, and if she succeeded in carrying it out, it would be all the better for Hugh. Wives like the mistress of New Court are not found every day—no, nor often twice in a lifetime, seeing that she was young, pretty, amiable, lively, accomplished, of good birth, rich, with no relations, and completely mistress of herself and of her purse. But this by the way.

At last the evening drew to a close, and the two ladies retired, leaving Hugh to stroll about and enjoy his cigar in the pleasant night air: for, since he had been in London, he had fallen into a habit of crowning the day in a manner which was by no means universal in times when a pipe was almost the brand of a sot, and a cigar of a rake. It is probable that

Madam Clare was ignorant of this habit of his, for she had never mentioned it to him, and it is very certain that she would have objected to so foreign an innovation most strongly.

In spite of his long conversation with his aunt upon the subject, his head was by no means overflowing with politics as he enjoyed this gift of a Peninsular friend of his. He was in that pleasant frame of mind that is caused by the influence of a good dinner, a pleasant evening, bodily fatigue, and the exchange of the noise of town for country quietness. Earl's Dene was simply the quietest place in the whole world—just fit, in fact, to be the dwelling-place of the very old and the very young: and though its heir was not of an age to appreciate perfect repose for long together, still there is no time of life at which a sudden plunge into a bath of silence is not refreshing, and, for a few hours, the most delightful thing in the world. And so he found it, while, in that most pleasant of all mental conditions which is called thinking of nothing, he looked from the terrace over the broad green park, over the spire of the little church of Graylford, over the silver Grayl itself, now in the moonlight more silver than ever, and over the tall woods, which had but just exchanged the green of spring for that of summer, to

the low, faintly purple hills that marked the border of the Wold country.

While thus engaged, one of Miss Clare's keepers came up to him.

"Glad to see you down here again, sir," he said, touching his cap.

"I'm always glad to be down here, Roberts," he answered, with the inconsistency of honesty. "And how are things doing?"

"Oh, sir, pretty fairish. Not much doing though, sir."

"No, I suppose not. I expect you've all of you been lazy enough since I was here last."

"Well, sir, there's mostly things to be done. But you see, Mr Hugh, June isn't September."

"And you wish it was, no doubt?"

"No, sir. I takes things as they be, and they mostly comes pretty right, take 'em all in all."

"I don't know about that, Roberts. I should like to think when I go to bed to-night that one was going to have a fling at the birds in the morning."

"Well, sir, maybe you're right. But I don't know—maybe September wouldn't come so pleasant if June didn't come once a-year or so. And how do you find madam, sir?"

"Well, she doesn't seem complaining."

"I be glad of that, Mr Hugh. But you see your being here cheers her up a bit like. I be feared she do find it but dull when you're up and gone. All on us do that, sir."

"Then I must stay as long as I can, for your sakes."

"I hope you will, sir. But if you ben't too busy, just now, Mr Hugh——"

"I don't look so, do I?"

"Well, sir, there be something I wanted to mention."

"What is it?"

"Why, you see, sir, madam be main special about things, and don't like folk coming all nohow into the place, special just now, among the does, you know, sir: and I have to look after 'em. And she be right, too, sir, what with all them hands out of the town, and such——"

"Well?"

"Well, sir, most all mornings, ever since they be got fine, when I be down past the Lodge Park, where the does be, I see a young lady—leastwise a young 'oman, sir, though I don't say as she ben't a young lady——"

"Really? This is interesting."

"Yes, sir, it be. Well, Mr Hugh, this young lady

—for I be nigh sure she be a lady—gets over the rails of the Lodge Park, sir, right amid the does——”

“She can’t be very careful of her clothes, then, unless the fence has been mended.”

“Nor of the does, sir. Well, of course that frights the things a bit, not knowing of her as they knows me——”

“Well?”

“Well, sir, that be all.”

“It doesn’t seem to me to be so very alarming. Why don’t you speak to her, or to Miss Clare? I suppose she’s not a mill-hand, as you call her a young lady?”

“I’d ha’ spoke to her pretty sharp, if she’d been that. And you see, sir, as how madam be rather put about, just now, what with the doctors and the ’lection lawyers: and then she don’t like to be vexed with things: she’d say as ’twere my work to look after the does——”

“And after the young ladies?”

“Yes, sir. And I didn’t like to speak to the young lady without just asking a word—she might be a town lady, sir: and, as ’lection time be nigh——”

Hugh laughed. “I see,” he said: “go on.”

“It might get set about, sir, as how one of madam’s men had unbehaved to a Denethorp lady, and then

madam might blow me up for it. And so I thought as I'd best wait till you was come down, sir: for, says I, if anybody knows what to do in a case, it be just Mr Hugh."

"I don't know about that, Roberts. Young ladies are sometimes hard cases to tackle. But you have done quite rightly. What does she do in the Lodge Park? Walk there? I should have thought she could have found a better place for a morning walk than there, especially as she has to scramble over the rails. Is she young, did you say?"

"She be youngish: but I don't think she have got a sweetheart—I'd ha' soon spoke up to *him*."

"I've no doubt you would."

"And what she does, sir, I can't say, as I can't make out, like."

"What time does she go?"

"Early, sir—about seven, most days: some days before."

"Well, Roberts, you have done quite right in waiting to see me. I'd best speak myself to my aunt—or, better still, to the young lady herself—why not? I'll get up to-morrow on purpose. Where does she get over?"

"Just by the big beech, sir."

"I know. You'll just keep out of the way——"

"All right, Mr Hugh."

"And, if she comes, I'll manage matters."

"Take care if she be a Denethorp lady, sir."

"All right. I shall certainly take care not to offend the most influential half of my future constituents. By Jove! I'll remember that: it'll make a capital tag to a speech. Prescott himself couldn't have put it better."

"And the does, Mr Hugh?"

"Shall be driven no more."

"Thank you, sir. And I hope I did right, sir?"

"Quite. You have shown yourself to be a man of both gallantry and discretion."

"Yes, sir. Is there anything I can do?"

"No, I don't think there is. By the way, I think of trying for a trout or two to-morrow, after I've been over in the town. Perhaps young Mr Warden might come over. How's the brook?"

"First-rate, sir."

"Then come to me before breakfast to-morrow, and we'll talk about it.—Well," continued Hugh to himself, "if I'm to take Robert's place in watching the does to-morrow morning, and have to be at the big beech by seven—by Jove! It sounds like a *rendez-vous*. I must turn in forthwith."

But he did not turn in forthwith; for he lighted another cigar, and did not leave the terrace for a good hour longer. If Miss Raymond could have read his thoughts just then, she would have felt flattered: nor would he have been the reverse of flattered could he have read hers.

CHAPTER IV.

NEVERTHELESS, however much he may have thought about Miss Raymond, and dreamed of her afterwards—supposing so admirable a sleeper to have dreamed about anything at all—he was not a little amused and interested by his prospective adventure, slight as it was : and he rose in excellent time for arriving at the great beech by seven o'clock.

Before getting up, however, he took care to learn what sort of weather it was, with a strong hope that it would prove to be raining cats and dogs, or at least that it would be such as to furnish him with an excuse for putting off the matter to another day : for early rising was not one of his habits, particularly after a journey. However, he was doomed to disappointment. The sun was shining brightly, and the air was both fresh and warm. So he turned out heroically, and found himself all the better for having made the exertion.

But, setting aside the difficulties of getting out of bed, there are many other things that seem easy enough the night before, but wear a very different aspect next morning, when they have actually to be done. Last night the matter seemed trivial and easy enough: but in cold blood, and before breakfast, too, to have to tell a young lady that she is trespassing, and to warn her off, was not an agreeable errand for one who had begun to pique himself upon his politeness to women. Hugh hoped, in that corner of his heart where, in spite of his easy manners, he still hoarded a plentiful stock of shyness, that the young lady might prove to be neither a lady nor young. That she might turn out to be pretty he neither hoped nor feared. He did not hope it, because hope implies expectation, and Denethorp was by no means rich in pretty girls at that period of its history: and his shyness was certainly not so great as to make him afraid of looking at a pretty face. He ran over in his mind the whole list of people in which the mysterious trespasser could possibly be included. Not the parson's wife, or any of his daughters—they were not likely to be walking all the way to Earl's Dene—a distance of full four miles—to gather dew in solitude. Nor for that matter were the wives or daughters of any one in Denethorp

with whom he was in the least acquainted. So he was driven to conclude that it must be some tradesman's daughter who had caught some of the prevailing taste of the day for sentimental eccentricity, or else had formed exaggerated ideas as to the value of the morning air as a cosmetic. The notion that she might meet a lover there he dismissed from his mind at once: for however women may be constituted in such matters, reason and experience alike told him that to suppose for a moment that any man could possibly be so much in love as to get up at six o'clock morning after morning to carry on a courtship in the long damp grass of the Lodge Park, with the certainty of catching cold, and the strong chance of being punished as a trespasser, was to suppose a gross absurdity. So, at least, he thought in his youthful cynicism. A better reason for his conclusion was, that Roberts, whose eyes were pretty sharp, had been of the same opinion.

In order, therefore, to satisfy his curiosity before proceeding to action, he took up a position from which, without being himself seen, he had a clear view of the great beech, whose arms, spreading well over the paling of the Lodge Park, afforded a favourite shelter for the persecuted does.

He had not long to wait. Scarcely had he lighted

a cigar, when, sure enough, he saw approaching along the line of trees that led from the main avenue to the beech in which they ended, a figure which was as plainly young as it was that of a lady. He had a full view of her very soon, and plenty of time to observe her as she came towards the tree.

What he saw was nothing very much, after all. It was only a small, slight figure, dressed in dark stuff, the colour of which matched a complexion into which the morning air and exercise had brought a little more freshness than was apparently habitual to it: a face remarkable for little but a thoughtful but pleasant smile: and brown hair gathered away under a shabby hat. She carried something in her hand that looked like a book.

Hugh waited until she reached the tree, and raising herself lightly and gracefully upon a swelling of the round bole near the root, had shown an evident intention of placing the paling between herself and the turf of the avenue. Then, thinking it high time to enter upon the scene before she had succeeded in placing herself in the awkward position of being caught in the very act of climbing over—awkward not only morally, but physically—and politely denying himself the chance of thus seeing the turn of her ankle—he left his place of half-concealment, and

advancing towards her in such a manner as not to take her by surprise, he raised his hat, threw away his cigar, and said, stupidly enough—for, having made up his mind as he came along as to what he ought to say, he of course did not say it,—

“I am exceedingly sorry—but—Miss Clare is very particular about the deer not being driven; and so—just now——”

The culprit, thus caught red-handed, as it were, turned round suddenly: and finding herself addressed by one who was so evidently a gentleman as Hugh Lester, and who was so evidently desirous, if he only knew how, of treating her politely, blushed slightly, as she answered—forgetting, however, to step down again upon the turf—in an accent that was neither of Denethorp nor of any place in England,—

“Am I doing wrong, sir?”

The “sir” grated upon his ears a little: it was not as “good style” as the rest of her manner and appearance. But the voice in which the objectionable word had been uttered was altogether superior to style.

“Oh, not at all: but, as I said, my aunt—Miss Clare, that is—is very particular about not allowing any one in the Lodge Park: and though I have

no doubt she would make an exception in your case, still, you understand—at least, I hope you see—that—I am very sorry to have interrupted your walk.” *Lame and impotent conclusion!*

The Lady, naïvely.—“I am very sorry too; but if Miss Clare does not permit it, of course I must not go there. Of course I did not know I was doing wrong.”

Lester.—“Nor were you—that is—but, after all, the Lodge Park is not the pleasantest part of the place, and there can be no objection to your going everywhere else as much and as often as you please. And so I have not confined your walk so very much. I hope you will not let me think I have offended you by avoiding Earl’s Dene, or I should be sorry indeed.”

The Lady, rather stiffly.—“Thank you. You are very kind, and I am certainly not offended.”

Lester, seeing that he had made a blunder in the form of his last speech.—“I am glad of that. I was afraid you might think you had not been treated very courteously.”

The Lady, descending from her perch, and after a short pause, during which she had been considering.—“Pray do not mention it. It is I who ought to apologise. But as I have been here a good many

mornings now, of course I thought there was no harm."

Another pause. Then,—

The Lady, with a sudden frankness, and as though her mind was quite made up.—"I should only have come once or twice more."

Lester.—"Might I ask if you have any special purpose, then, for wishing to come here? If so, no doubt Miss Clare would give you permission willingly."

The Lady.—"Yes: and I should certainly like to be able to come once or twice again." Lester waited for her to explain. "In fact it was the deer that tempted me."

Lester, mystified.—"The deer?"

The Lady.—"Yes: to study them."

Lester.—"Ah, I see. You are an artist, then?"

The Lady.—"I am a learner."

Lester.—"Then I beg your pardon more than ever. I know Miss Clare would be only too happy to let you sketch her deer."

The Lady, evidently not intending to let her chance slip.—"I should be so glad! But she might not like it; and——"

Lester.—"Oh, she would be sure to make no objection. On the contrary, she would feel flat-

tered. But I cannot give you leave myself. I must speak to her first——”

The Lady.—“Of course. But I hope you will not put yourself to any trouble on my account——”

Lester.—“It would be no trouble at all. How could it be? Let me see—I will speak to Miss Clare to-day: but how can I let you know her answer? But it would be sure to be all right, and you could come here to-morrow, if you like, very safely.”

The Lady.—“I should not like to, without knowing.”

Lester, struck by a good thought.—“Then she or I could write you a note. You would get it to-day, if you live at Denethorp, as I suppose you do: so, if you would tell me your address——”

The Lady, gratefully.—“You are most kind indeed, sir, and I should be ashamed to trouble you or Miss Clare so much as that: and, as it is, I am ashamed of seeming so persistent about what you must, I’m sure, think a mere caprice.”

Lester.—“What trouble could it possibly be? If you will tell me your address, I shall remember it.”

The Lady.—“Then, as you are so kind—Miss Lefort, 23 Market Street.”

Lester.—"Thanks. You shall hear to-day, or to-morrow at farthest. Meanwhile I will take it upon myself to ask you to finish your sketch this morning."

The Lady.—"Thanks indeed: but I could not think of such a thing."

Lester.—"But why not? Surely——"

The Lady, resolutely.—"I would rather not now, indeed. I would much rather wait till I can come with Miss Clare's permission."

Lester.—"I am afraid you are angry with me?"

The Lady, very coldly.—"Not at all—why should I be?"

Lester.—"For having interrupted your studies for a whole morning. And the least I can do——"

The Lady, with a smile.—"I daresay you have not done my studies very much harm."

Lester.—"But I cannot allow you to have had your long walk for nothing. I must really ask you to remain this morning, if only to set my conscience at ease."

The Lady.—"But I do not consider that I have had my walk for nothing, by any means. To meet with kindness surely cannot be called nothing. But, indeed, I would very much rather put off my sketch till another time."

Lester, seeing that she did not intend to be persuaded.—“Then, since you will not do me this kindness, I will see that it shall be finished as soon as possible. But I am sorry—I wish I could persuade you to remain.”

The Lady.—“You are most kind indeed. It is I that ought to be sorry.”

Lester, not liking to press her further.—“You have no occasion to be, I assure you. By the way, Miss Lefort, if I might ask you, are you living in Denethorp? If you are visiting, I may very likely know something of your friends.”

The Lady.—“We have been many years in Denethorp. My father is a teacher of French.”

Lester.—“Oh, I think I have heard of him. I hope that he finds the place suit him, and that he has no want of pupils?”

The Lady.—“Oh, he does well enough. But now I must wish you good morning, and thank you once more.”

She made him a grave bow, which *Lester* answered by raising his hat, and was gone. He wished that he had been able to persuade her to remain, and failing in this, would have willingly invented an excuse for seeing her as far as the great gates: but as that, to judge from her manner, was wholly

out of the question, he lighted another cigar, and, with a good appetite for breakfast, strolled quietly back to the house.

On reaching the garden he met Miss Raymond.

"Why, what an early riser you are!" she said.

"Not in general, I am afraid."

"So I hear you are going into Parliament?"

"My aunt has told you? Yes, if I win."

"Of course you will win."

"Perhaps I shall, if you canvass for me. Prescott, they say, turns the heads of all the women: but if you appear in the field, I shall have one on my side worth a host."

"But suppose Mr Prescott turned mine with the others?"

"Then I should at once retire from the contest. The election would be virtually decided. Will my aunt be down to breakfast?"

"She is down."

"Already? Is it so late? By Jove, so it is!"

"Do you call this late—you, a Londoner?"

"I meant I did not know I had been out so long. I have been having a *rendezvous* with a young lady, you must know."

"With a young lady?"

"It is quite true, I assure you. I arranged it last night before I went to bed."

"You certainly make good use of your time. But what do you mean?"

"I have spoken the exact truth."

"Nonsense. Come in to breakfast—that will be more amiable than asking riddles. Miss Clare has been down this half-hour."

"I will follow then, since you lead. And you shall hear my confession."

At the breakfast-table he gave a lively account of his adventure, much to Miss Raymond's amusement: but, when he mentioned the name Lefort,—

"Why, surely," she said, "it can't be Angélique?"

"And who is Angélique?"

"Oh, my friend—my travelling companion. She is staying with her friends, while I am staying with mine. Oh, I daresay it is her cousin—she has one. By the way, Miss Clare, I ought to call on the Leforts. They were old *protégés* of my dear mother. Could I, do you think?"

"Oh, certainly, if you wish it."

"That will be capital," said Hugh. "I am going to drive over to Denethorp after breakfast to see

White. If you like to trust yourself with me, you can see your friends while I am doing my talk. White will keep me some time, I daresay."

"Oh, that would be delightful! I should so like the drive, but——"

But Miss Clare made no objection, and so the arrangement was made.

CHAPTER V.

LEAVING Hugh Lester to the enjoyment of his well-earned breakfast, Miss Lefort, when he parted from her, walked quickly but quietly along the avenue towards the lodge, naturally rather flurried by her unexpected interruption, and yet rather pleased at it too—something in the same way as a child may feel pleased by the excitement of having been caught in a piece of mischief, scolded, and forgiven. She had liked the manner of her new acquaintance, and felt even flattered by his evident care to be polite to her under difficulties. In short, she had been anything but offended by her morning's adventure. In this mood she traversed the long three miles of dusty highroad leading to the town, and then, passing the few villas and ornamental cottages, the exact reverse of ornamental, that showed Denethorp to be what builders call an improving place, and a narrow old-fashioned street or two, in which still remained not

a few houses with the projecting storeys and pointed roofs of centuries ago, stopped before a bootmaker's shop that bore the number 23. The shutters were not yet taken down, nor was the shop-door open: but, at the side entrance, a shabby, red-armed servant-girl was producing a miniature and muddy flood by scrubbing and mopping the rough pavement in front of it. Stepping as well as she could over the barricade of mops and pails, Miss Lefort made her way up a dark and dusky staircase, smelling of close windows, to the second floor.

The room which Miss Lefort entered was in the front of the house, and looked out upon the narrow Market Street: that is to say, upon a double row of second and third rate shops, principally patronised by the small farmers of the neighbourhood who drove into town on Thursday—Denethorp market-day—and looked down upon by the wives and daughters of the mill-owners, lawyers, doctors, and parsons, who composed the aristocracy and plutocracy of the place, and who, for the most part, did their shopping at Redchester. It was therefore for six days out of the seven rather excessively quiet, not to say dull: and, on the seventh, very much too noisy. This particular room in No. 23 was not of a character in itself to mitigate the effect of the external dulness

that reigned from Friday to Wednesday inclusive: and as its windows commanded the whole length of the street, it had the full benefit of the one day of bustle. It was small, and poorly furnished in what may be called for the occasion, after the same manner as that in which one speaks of the *style Pompadour* or *Louis XIV.*, or *de la Renaissance*, the *style crinière*, or horse-hair style—a style too well known and too unvarying even in its minutest details to require special description. There are few so fortunate as never to have met with it once: and whoever has seen one specimen knows as much about it as if he had seen a hundred. The occupants of the room, however, had more individuality than the chairs on which they had to sit—a remark that cannot be made of all occupants of all rooms, even when the latter are not furnished in the horse-hair mode.

The group which they formed consisted of two young children—a boy and a girl of about nine and seven years old respectively, who were romping noisily upon the hearth-rug in a manner that would have horrified all believers in the virtue of clean clothes: a man of about fifty-five at the least, or of seventy at the most, short, thin, narrow-chested, pale, stooping, bald, with meagre sharp features, a yellow complexion, and long and lean but delicate hands,

shabbily dressed and unmistakably a foreigner, who was drinking coffee at the table: and a girl, or rather young woman, who was engaged in reading a letter at the window.

She was like Miss Lefort, and yet not like her at the same time: that is to say, there was a vague and general resemblance between the two in an altogether indefinable way, and a wide dissimilarity between them in all points of detail.

Now there are three ways of describing the appearance of a beautiful woman. One is to treat her passport fashion—*Height*, five feet so many inches: *age*, five-and-twenty, more or less: *figure*, slight and undulating: *complexion*, brown and pale: *hair*, dark brown: *eyes*, the same—large, soft, and tender: *nose*, straight: and so on. This, of course, is an accurate way: but it has the defect of never producing anything better than a common form applicable to many hundreds. It is easy enough to make a catalogue of good points, but it is not by a mere series of good points that any idea of beauty is expressed to the mind. Another way is to adopt the laudatory style, and to say, as might justly be said in this case, that she was of exactly the right height for her style of figure, and of exactly the right style of figure for her height, and that she carried both with grace: that

her autumnal complexion combined the merits of the *brunette* and of the *blonde*: and that, beautiful as she was in all respects, her greatest wealth of beauty was in her eyes. Yet another way is the poetical, or metaphorical: but then that is always open to the objection that to say what a thing is like is very different indeed from saying what it really is. Such an image, for instance, as that of a harvest moon shining against all rule in a night of May upon a garden of pale hyacinths, which had indeed bowed their heads but had forgotten to close their bells when the sun went down, would be absolutely out of place in the sober prose of common life, however useful it might have proved to any lover of this girl's who happened to have a knack of rhyming.

These are about the only three ways: and, perhaps, if any one should take the trouble to combine what has been said under the head of each method, he might succeed in producing an imaginary portrait not wildly unlike the original.

But it is an unfortunate and lamentable fact that, while it is difficult, if not impossible, to praise intelligibly, to find fault and point out defects intelligibly is the easiest thing in the world. While it requires something approaching to genius to make a complimentary speech about any man that does not

sound like sarcasm or drivel, it does not require that a man should be a Demosthenes to deliver, without going beyond the truth, a telling philippic against even the best and wisest. To descend, then, from general to particular cases, beautiful as this woman undoubtedly was, it is far easier to point out her faults of appearance than to describe her merits.

There was first, then, a want of that harmony about her by which many women who are plain of feature are rendered almost if not quite beautiful. The moon of September in a night of spring, the flower remaining open after sunset, are images that may suggest beauty, but certainly do not suggest harmony or repose. Then her admirably-shaped mouth was of the smallest: a doubtful merit as regards beauty of feature, and always a positive fault as regards beauty of expression. Then, too, the grace of her carriage was plainly a little studied: unnecessarily so, for it was graceful enough by nature, and probably less languid than she made it seem. Again, her forehead lacked both height and breadth without being more than commonly well formed. Her delicate hand, moreover, wanted the plumpness that a young hand ought to have, thus telling either of ill health, present or to come, or else of excess of ner-

vous excitability. But, after all, these were all but spots on the sun. She seemed to be a few years younger than Miss Lefort in point of figure: but in point of expression, which is a far better test, she looked decidedly the elder.

When Miss Lefort entered the room, all looked up suddenly as though she had not been expected: and the two children ran up to her and seized her hands and dress. In striking contrast to her who has been last described, her figure was without languor, and her complexion had been freshened by the morning air, so that, if she was far less beautiful, she was certainly not less pleasant to look upon.

Monsieur Lefort.—"Good morning, Marie. You are back soon."

Marie.—"Good morning, father. Ah, Angélique, you should have been with me this morning."

Angélique, folding her letter, and a little languidly.—"And why this morning in particular?"

They all spoke in French: but her voice was of a kind to render almost too musical that most unmusical of languages. But even her voice, too, had a fault—it wanted fulness.

Marie.—"Because you have lost an adventure. You see what comes of being an early bird."

Angélique, exerting herself.—"But I don't like

worms, dear Marié : I prefer coffee. I hope, though, that yours was a nice fat one ?”

Marie—“Hm ! that depends.”

Ernest and Fleurette.—“Tell us, Marie ! And have you made any more pictures ?”

Marie, giving them her sketch-book.—“There—see what I have done.”

Ernest.—“Why, it is all empty.”

Marie.—“That is an end of the story, then. But I see, *Angélique*, that you have had your worm as well, and without the trouble of going out to look for it. What is it ? A letter ? Why, that is an event ! What is it ? Who is it from ?”

Angélique.—“From Félix. He is in England.”

Marie.—“Félix in England ? You are joking, surely.”

Angélique, looking through her eyelashes.—“Is it, then, so strange that he should come to England ?”

Marie, going up to and embracing her.—“Not the least—not at all ! How I am dying to see him ! But I am sure he cannot be good enough. If he is not the handsomest and cleverest man in the world, I assure you that I have made up my mind to hate him. Are you not afraid ?”

Angélique, looking at the children.—“Hush, dear Marie.”

Marie.—"But does he tell you nothing? You always are saying, you know, that I only care about facts. Is he well?"

Ernest and Fleurette.—"But the story, Marie!"

Angélique.—"He is quite well. And there are no facts, indeed."

Marie.—"Oh, well, I will have patience, especially as I am hungry, for my worm was not very satisfying—not half so interesting as yours, after all."

Ernest and Fleurette, vociferously.—"The story!"

Marie.—"My dear children, I am dying with hunger. Get me the butter, Ernest, and you the bread, Fleurette, or I shall have to eat my story instead, and then there will be none of it left for you. Fancy Félix being in England! Can you not tell me anything out of the letter, just to relish the *tartines*? there's a dear girl!"

Angélique.—"There is nothing that will not keep."

Marie.—"Then I must put an extra lump of sugar in my coffee, to make up. Have you any news, father?"

M. Lefort.—"None that is good."

Marie.—"I hope there is nothing wrong?"

M. Lefort.—"No. I only mean that every day that passes without a letter makes things seem more doubtful. Of course I know that they must have

their hands full—but what then? Ah! I remember forty years ago——”

Marie.—“But no news is good news, they say. As for myself, I don’t expect to hear till all is settled. Why should any one trouble to write before?”

M. Lefort.—“Well, a man who has waited thirty years can afford to wait thirty-one, I suppose. And so we must be patient,—that’s all.”

Marie.—“And hope.”

M. Lefort.—“Ah! you are young. I did so once. But now you will have to hope for us both, if you speak of hope.”

Marie.—“But, seriously, dear father, why should we not all hope? Even if the worst comes to the worst, and nothing can be done for us, what have we really to fear? Are we not happy as we are? Should we be happier for a change? We should be no richer than now, and you would have to work just as hard. Should we even be as rich as we shall be in England? Angélique must be a great singer one day: and am I too stupid to teach notes and scales?”

M. Lefort, smiling in spite of himself.—“Conceited girl!”

Marie.—“I thought you would agree with me. Oh, I believe in myself immensely, and am not a

bit afraid for any of us. That was very good coffee indeed. Who made it?"

Fleurette.—"I did."

Marie.—"Then I believe in you most of all, and I will tell you the story."

Ernest.—"And me?"

Marie.—"You may listen. Well, once upon a time their lived a princess——"

Ernest.—"Who was beautiful, of course."

Marie.—"No, not at all. But she was very fond of beautiful things and beautiful creatures—perhaps for that very reason—and so one day she set out to look for them all over the world. First of all, she looked in her own looking-glass, but that wouldn't do."

Fleurette.—"Why not?"

Marie.—"Because hers was a glass that always told the truth. So then——"

Ernest.—"What was her name?"

Marie.—"She had none. Then she looked out at window, but she saw nothing but people who were nearly as ugly as herself. At last, however, she heard of a country a very long way off indeed—four miles at least—where there lived a queen: and as she heard that it was full of beautiful things, she set out at once to find it."

Fleurette.—"All by herself?"

Marie.—"All by herself. That is the only way to find out beautiful things."

Fleurette.—"And wasn't she afraid?"

Marie.—"I'm not sure she wasn't a little, just at first. Well, she left the palace where the king her father, and the prince her brother, and the princess her sister, and the princess her cousin all lived together, and walked on, and on, and on along a dusty road, until she didn't feel quite sure about her way. At last she didn't know which way to turn: but she saw that one looked prettier than another, and so she took it. Well, the road got prettier and prettier every step she took until she came to a white cottage built of stone and covered with leaves, with an old witch sitting at the door nursing a black cat."

Fleurette.—"And then wasn't she frightened?"

Marie.—"Anyhow she was bold enough to ask the old witch, 'Is this the queen's country?' And the witch pointed with her crutch to a gate, and said, 'If you go through there, and then turn to the right, and keep straight on, you'll come to the avenue'—just as though she was not a witch at all, but only a common old woman."

Ernest.—"Perhaps that's what she was."

Marie.—"You know nothing about it. Then the princess said 'Thank you,' and walked along the

avenue till she looked over some palings and saw the most beautiful creatures."

Fleurette.—"What were they like? Birds?"

Marie.—"No; they had four legs, and large black eyes, and some were dappled, and some white, and some black, and some grey. And the princess said, 'Oh, if I could only find out what makes these creatures so beautiful!'"

Ernest.—"She ought to have caught them."

Marie.—"She wandered about, and went every day to look at the creatures. Then she thought she would make some pictures of them, and at last, just as she was beginning to find out their true secret——"

Fleurette.—"What?"

Marie.—"She suddenly heard a voice exclaim, 'Who is that in my park-paling?'"

Ernest.—"Who was it? The queen?"

Marie.—"No, it was a prince, the heir to the throne. He looked very fierce indeed, and had a cigar in his mouth."

Ernest.—"But princes in stories never used to smoke cigars."

Marie.—"No: but they do now. Then the princess got very frightened, and fell on her knees and begged for mercy."

Fleurette.—"And did he kill her?"

Marie.—"No; he took pity on the princess; but said that the queen, his aunt, would certainly have her put to death. But he said he would ask the queen to forgive her if she would promise not to frighten the beautiful creatures again, as it seems she had done. So you see she had been rightly punished by being frightened herself"

Fleurette.—"And did the queen pardon her?"

The red-armed Servant, after tapping at the door.—
"A note for you, miss."

Marie, eagerly.—"For me? From whom?"

The Servant, with an air of awe.—"Brought by a young man, miss, a groom up at Earl's Dene. He said as there was no answer."

M. Lefort.—"From Earl's Dene!"

Marie, after passing through a slight cloud of disappointment.—"There, Angélique! I have letters as well as you! The queen sent her this letter:—"

"'DEAR PRINCESS,'—No, it was the prince sent it. —'Dear Princess,—Her Majesty has much pleasure in giving you permission to use the Lodge Park at any time you please, and also hopes to have the further pleasure of seeing the result. I promised her to add that she would rather you did not enter the Lodge Park at the great beech, as it disturbs the

deer, but through the gate on the other side. They will tell you the way to it at the Lodge.

‘Hoping you will consider this some amends for the rudeness of which, I fear, you must have thought me guilty this morning,—I am, yours most truly,

‘HUGH LESTER.

‘As Mr Lefort lives in Denethorp, I trust you will not think that Miss Clare’s permission applies to yourself only. The keepers will have orders accordingly.’”

M. Lefort, having looked at the note.—“This is very polite indeed. Why, Marie, this looks very like a real adventure.”

Marie.—“And a pleasant one, is it not?”

Angélique.—“What sort of person is this Mr Lester?”

Ernest, silyly.—“And will the prince marry the princess?”

Fleurette.—“And shall we all go and see the beautiful creatures?”

Marie.—“I don’t know anything more about it.”

CHAPTER VI.

CERTAINLY the new Fellow of St Margaret's might consider that he had made the most of himself, so far. It was not only that he had succeeded, but his success had been entirely owing to his own exertion; and in such a case a little self-glorification is not unbecoming. Unlike most men, he was not forced to think how differently he would act were it in his power to begin his university life over again. He had not run into debt: he had formed no social habits that require an expenditure of time or money: he had not even wasted himself in conversation, intellectual speculation, or desultory reading. As he had been at school, such was he in his freshman's year, and such he remained until he put on his bachelor's hood. From the very first day of his taking possession of his attic in St Margaret's College he devoted himself entirely to the orthodox work of the place, in his pursuit of which he never

allowed himself to be disturbed by any kind of distraction whatever. Moreover, every day with him meant work—work conscious and actual: and his power of realising the immediate end to be attained, and of adopting and carrying out the right means to attain it, was so strong that he can scarcely be said to have exercised any real self-denial in the course which he pursued. Spurred on by his special form of ambition, or rather by what stood in the place of ambition, he showed what may be done by a student without genius, without the incentive afforded by a sense of duty, and without enthusiasm, or love of learning for its own sake. Had the rewards of his university been bestowed for proficiency in billiards, to billiards he would have devoted himself with equal zeal: and it was in precisely the same spirit that he devoted himself to Greek and mathematics. As may well be supposed, he was not very popular among the men of his own standing, and made but few acquaintances: but he made himself respected, and he valued college popularity at its true worth—which is very little. While far abler men than himself were living according to the number of their years, this old head upon young shoulders was exemplifying the fable of the hare and the tortoise.

Not a remarkably amiable character this, but certainly not weak or contemptible. Such men do not often achieve greatness, but success they can scarcely help achieving. In the result, at the end of his three years, Warden was, on the whole, beaten by only two men in his year: in mathematics, by a man who, young as he was, loved science with the unselfish and all-absorbing love that she demands from her lovers: and in classics, by a strange sort of ruffian who was drunk five days in the week, who slept all the sixth, and who then on the seventh, when he was awake and sober, laughed over Aristophanes till he was drunk again, but who spouted Anacreon over his cups, and dreamed of Greek roots in iambic trimeters. But, barring the enthusiast and the genius, the practical man, who simply read hard to secure his Fellowship, was in front of the field. And he had his reward: for while he sat in ease and comfort at the high table of St Margaret's, the senior wrangler was dying of consumption, and the constitution of his other rival, originally as strong as that of a hundred horses, had begun to yield to the inevitable Nemesis of drink, after its possessor had come to grief with the authorities on account of some Greek epigrams which had displayed a great deal more wit and scholarship than reverence or decency.

And now Mark Warden, to whom Aristophanes was only so much matter to be "read"—to use the word in its undergraduate sense—to whom the stars might have been bits of tinfoil for anything he cared, and who, for reasons that Marie could have told, had no right to sit at the high table at all, returned to his father's house as it were in a halo of triumph. When he reached it, the street-door was standing open, so that he had no need to knock or ring in order to pass through the entrance-hall into a small parlour—how small it seemed to him now!—in which a suggestion of wall-flowers unnaturally strove with a decided perfume of tobacco and hot spirits. It was furnished in a more home-like style than the room in Market Street, and yet, somehow, it did not look so much like home. The effect of it upon Mark was even rather chilling. His college rooms were by no means extravagantly sumptuous or unnecessarily comfortable, but they had the advantage of the comparison: and then it must be remembered that he had been a little put out of temper with himself and his belongings towards the end of his journey. And then this was no longer really his home. He had risen above the family level, and its ways were no longer his ways, nor its thoughts his thoughts. And then the old scene suggested mem-

ories to him that three years of work and absence had naturally not a little clouded: and although they had been very bearable to him while they did not affect his daily life, they began to look formidable now that he was in the very midst of them again.

The parlour was empty of all save the greasy leather chair, the scratched and bruised mahogany table, the worn-out carpet, the dusty corner-cupboard, and all the other articles of furniture that he had once accepted as part of the nature of things, but which now looked to him so wretchedly mean and shabby. He was about to pull the bell-rope to announce his arrival, when a maid-servant, not over neat or clean, considering the lateness of the hour, and who, to judge from the redness of her bared arms, in which she supported a tray, might have been own sister to her of Market Street, as indeed very likely she was, put her head in at the door, and then, overcome by either fear or modesty at the sight of a strange gentleman, gave a scream and let the tray with its contents—fortunately nothing fragile—clatter upon the floor.

“Is my father at home?” asked Mark, a little crossly, for such a welcome as this jarred upon his nerves.

“Why, save us! it’s Master Mark. Lord, sir, how

you be growed out of sight! You give one quite a turn."

"I was expected, was I not?"

"Well, Master M——, sir, I did hear something. But master, he've dined——"

"Oh, I didn't mean that. Is he in? or my sister?"

"Master's in the surg'ry. And Miss Lorry—I'll go and fetch her."

And this was the triumphant return!

Presently, however, down ran Miss Lorry—beaming, gushing, rosy, and untidy. "Oh, Mark," she cried, throwing herself upon him with a rush, "we'd quite given you up! How hungry you must be!"—was it his fancy only that she said *'ungry*?—"But I'm so glad! Did you come all the way from Cambridge to-day?"—This was not likely, seeing that the journey was over two hundred miles—"Only think! why, I shouldn't have known you! I *am* so glad!" And, to do her justice, she looked as pleased as she said she was.

"It is a long time, isn't it? and my father?"

"Oh, he's all right: Jane is gone to tell him. He'll be here directly. Oh, I *am* so sorry! We had dinner at one. I wonder is there anything in the house! Oh, of course—there's the mutton: I

daresay it's got cold by now. Or it might be warmed, mightn't it? Oh, here's papa. I thought he wouldn't be long."

And so in came Mr Warden from the surgery—tall, big, loose, florid, loud-mannered and loud-voiced as ever, or rather more than ever, bringing with him a jovial smile, and an atmosphere that showed that if Lorry had been answerable for the scent of the wall-flowers, he was responsible for the other part of the odour of the room.

"Ah, Mark, my boy—delighted to see you! So here you are back again with three hundred a-year all of your own! Who'd have thought it? Ah, college is a fine thing. Fancy a boy of mine making money! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've had to work for it, though."

"Well, well: that's all the better, isn't it? Everybody ought to put his shoulder to the wheel—that's my maxim. But all work and no play, you know. So now you've come to idle a bit, hey?"

"And how are things with you, father?"

"Oh, slack—slack. But we rub on, Lorry and me. One might do something, if it weren't for that damned fool Jones. I was in consultation with him to-day. He's got in with madam, you know—and

much good he'll do her. 'Pon my honour, I don't believe he knows the liver from the stomach: and as for his *diagnosis*—pooh!”

By this time the mutton made its appearance upon the same unfortunate tray. It was both red and tepid: but hunger, though used to look for its satisfaction to the high table of St Margaret's, is still hunger, and Mark had not grown too dainty to be superior to the effects of a long day spent on the roof of a coach. Besides, the air of Denethorp is not much less appetising than that of Cambridge itself, which is notorious in that respect. And so, though his eyes revolted, he attacked the joint not unwillingly.

“You mentioned Miss Clare,” he said, after a few minutes of silence, during which Lorry sat staring at him with all her eyes, and his father ruminated over the sins of Jones. “I travelled with her nephew from Redchester.”

“Ah, young Lester? Not a bad fellow that. Set a collar-bone for him once, out with the hounds, when he wasn't that high. He's tall enough now. Lucky dog he is. By the way, there's to be a fight.”

“A fight?”

“Yes, for Johnston's seat: and he'll be beat too. You're just in time to see the fun.”

"And who's going to stand, then?" Politics had not been in Mark's line, and so he only asked the question for the sake of saying something.

"Oh, a man named Prescott—another lucky dog, and an out-and-outer—reformer, you know, and that. Speaks just like a what's-his-name, and in with all the mill-people. He canvassed me the other day. I'd half a mind to promise for him, just to go against that ass Jones."

"But you couldn't do that very well."

"Couldn't I, though? And I would have too, only then there's that other ass young Smith, who's got hold of that lot. What they can see in him Lord knows! Why, he isn't as old as you are. Jones don't know a liver from a stomach, but Smith don't know man from mutton. No, no. I must vote for Church and King—Church and King, you know—if it was only to put down young Smith. 'Confound their politics, frustrate their knavish tricks!' Now, Lorry, just get out the tumblers, there's a girl, and the brandy. I'm going to have a pipe."

His son did not smoke, nor did he drink spirits, whatever taste he, as a College Fellow, had managed to acquire for the nobler port. So he sat unoccu-

pied while his father filled the long clay pipe, of the kind known to connoisseurs, as a "churchwarden," and mixed himself a pretty stiff tumbler.

"And now we're comfortable and all at home again," said the latter. "Why, bless my soul, Lorry, you haven't had that window mended yet! We don't want that sort of draught—ha, ha, ha! And now, Mark, my boy, what's next?"

"Next?"

"Yes—when you're going in to be a bishop, you know?"

"I'm not at all sure I shall go into the Church at all."

"What is it to be, then?"

"I think I shall go to London and read for the bar. I've got my Fellowship to keep me meanwhile, you know."

"Read for the bar! Bless my heart and soul!" Let it be remembered that to be a barrister was in itself something of a distinction in those days, whatever it may be in these.

"Why not? It seems my best way of doing something in the world."

"Well, you know best, no doubt—you know best. Only be anything but a doctor, that's all I say."

"La, Mark," said Lorry; "what, like the people

when the judge comes in at Redchester? And shall you have to wear a wig?"

Any reply that her brother might have been going to make to these appreciative remarks was interrupted by the arrival of one of the friends of the house—a managing clerk to one of the Denethorp attorneys, who, like his master in the old times, occasionally used to drop in of an evening to smoke a pipe with the Doctor. He was rather a smart fellow in his way, and was publicly supposed to have half an eye upon Miss Lorry—perhaps he would have bestowed the other half also upon her had her fortune been equal to her merit.

"Ah, Brown," said Mr Warden, "sit down, my boy. Mr Brown—my son from Cambridge." The two bowed to each other—Mr Brown genially, Mark stiffly. "And how are things going, Brown?" continued the Doctor. "What's the news?"

Mr Brown was certainly not "good style," and Mark had of late grown marvellously particular about such things. Besides, he had but just parted from Lester, whose style was undeniable. And so he did not go through his part of the introduction with a very good grace.

"Miss Warden," said the other, "delighted to

see you so blooming. Sir, delighted to make your acquaintance — proud indeed, Johnston's retired."

"What?" said the Doctor; "madam going to throw up the sponge? You astonish me!"

"Sounds queer, Doctor, don't it? But you don't know elections like I do. Between ourselves, you know, it'll turn out a dodge."

"To put Prescott's people off the scent."

"May be. But any way it'll be a dodge. Catch madam asleep—catch a weasel! Not to speak of White & Son. And I will say that for them, that no one ever caught the office napping yet. And there's something up—that I know for certain. You know young Lester?"

"Of course."

"Well, between ourselves, you know, it's a fact he came down by coach this very day. What do you think of that? Put two and two together—eh? I heard it from Sparks, who sat behind him all the way from Redchester."

"And what's he to do?"

"Why, stand! that's what he's to do. You take my word for it, madam means fighting; and I will say that for her, that when she means fighting she

fights—and no mistake. But won't the money have to fly, that's all!"

"I wish some of it would fly my way," said the Doctor, meditatively.

"It'll fly every way!" said Mr. Brown, triumphantly. "Denethorp hasn't had such a chance this many a day!"

CHAPTER VII.

It must have become pretty evident by this time that Mark Warden was sailing under false colours—that he had set out on the voyage of life in rather buccaneer fashion. He could not but own it, even to himself, distinctly and consciously.

And yet—what was he to do? Everything had somehow or other seemed so plain and easy to him while he was at Cambridge. There, he had not been able, living as an unmarried man with other unmarried men, absorbed in the work of the place, with only himself to think of, to feel that he was not as others were. Marie had become a sort of dream to him: and so he felt, whenever he thought about the matter at all, that he must have become a sort of dream to Marie. Had he been an idle man, with nothing to do but write love-letters, things might have worn a different aspect to him. But when a strong man's heart is in his work, and when that

work is purely selfish, he is seldom able to realise what concerns others. But now, once more in Denethorp, relieved from the iron of hard work, and in the midst of all the associations of three years ago, the image of Marie took a far more substantial form, and became anything but a dream. Once more, what was he to do?

He might resign his Fellowship, declare his marriage, and take a curacy and pupils. "Of course," the reader will say: "what else?" But then he would have thrown away the hopes, the labour, the success of years: he would condemn himself to an obscure and uncongenial life for the rest of his days: it would be far worse than committing suicide. No—anything but that, he thought. And let not the reader be too sure, if he is not guided by some nobler principle than Mark Warden, that he, under similar circumstances, would not think in a similar way. And so, before he slept, he entered into a sort of compromise with himself. The marriage had been secret for three years—let it be secret for four: and then—who knows what might happen? It is not only weak-minded men who, when pushed into a moral difficulty, cast their burden upon the shoulders of Fortune.

Nevertheless it was in a frame of mind made up

of doubt and of that sort of self-justification which is the surest symptom of unconscious shame that he, on rising, faced the fresh, honest breath of the morning, laden with the old-fashioned fragrance of the old-fashioned flowers of long ago. From the window of his room he saw his sister, with uncovered head, sleeves tucked up, and shoes down at heel, mysteriously engaged with a clothes-line which extended from one brick wall of the garden to the other: and the sight did not please him, for it suggested to him the vision of a future Mrs Brown. Then he descended into the parlour, still strongly flavoured with the effects of last evening. It was by no means early, but there were no signs of breakfast: indeed in that house nothing seemed to be done at any particular time or in any particular manner. Presently, however, his father came in: and then, somehow or other, breakfast and Lorry made their appearance together.

"Well, Mark," said the Doctor, "what are you up to to-day? I wanted to have seen something of you: but there's always something or another. I really must go and see that child of Wilkins's. I ought to have gone yesterday—only something put it out of my head: and—hang it! my boots weren't cleaned this morning. But never mind—they'll do

for once in a way. But that reminds me—I promised to go and see what's-his-name on Sunday. Well, well, I daresay it was nothing particular."

"Oh, never mind me. I shall just stroll about somewhere."

Laura looked knowingly at her brother: for though not a confidante of his great secret, she had not been blind to his great flirtation. "I think I can fancy where you'll stroll to," she said.

"And, Lorry," continued the Doctor, "if Summers calls about that bill again, you know, tell him I haven't forgotten it, or something like that: and if anybody else calls, say I shall be sure to be in some time or other. And you can have that window mended—only don't pay for it: and have in another bottle of brandy from the Chequers—I've got an account against them there of some sort or another, so it'll be all right. And now I must be off." And so he marched away heavily, munching his last mouthful of breakfast as he left the door.

Then Lorry in a few minutes was carried off by the red-armed maid, and Mark was left to follow his own devices.

His sister had proved to be a true prophetess. As, indeed, he was only bound in duty to do, he took himself slowly and uncomfortably to Market

Street. The distance was not far, but he was a long time in traversing it: for now that his meeting with Marie was imminent and inevitable, his anxiety about it, and about the nature of the relation that must somehow or other be established between him and her, for the present almost tempted him to fly from the situation altogether. He almost began to doubt whether he, the precociously wise, had not been guilty of a great piece of folly for once in his life.

Chance also aided his feeble attempts to procrastinate—attempts of which, to do him justice, he was half ashamed. It was by no means a pleasant thing for him to feel that he, Mark Warden, Wrangler, Fellow, *et cætera, et cætera*, was afraid to meet Marie, who was Marie and nothing more. He would have sufficiently despised any other man who feared to meet a woman, and that woman his own wife. But for himself, he welcomed the chance that aided him, nevertheless.

At a smart trot along the High Street came a light trap, driven by his travelling companion of yesterday. Hugh Lester also saw Warden and pulled up.

"You're the very man I want to see, Warden!" he said. "What do you think? I'm going to stand for Denethorp."

"Indeed? But I heard something about it last night. I wish you a triumphant return, with all my heart."

"Thanks, old fellow. But you must do something more than that. You've become a great man here, you know."

"I am sure I did not know it."

"I don't know what people don't think you've been doing. There seems a sort of impression that you've been made Archbishop of Canterbury. I've been having a little talk with White, you know. I wish you'd come and see him, if you wouldn't mind."

"But what could I do?"

"Oh, lots of things. You see this is how things are, or something like it. You have heard, I suppose, that they want to turn us out?"

"But they won't, of course."

"Not if we can help it. But from what White says they seem to have got all the brains on their side and most of the money. Are you a good hand at talking—at spouting, I mean?"

"I never made a speech in my life."

"Never mind that. The fact is, White has been asking me about you, and I told him you could do everything. So just come and see him—there's a good fellow. I shall be tremendously obliged."

"I should be delighted to be of any use, of course—if I thought I could be of any."

"Of course you can. You'll come and see White, then?"

"Now?"

"If you could. Can you?"

Warden smiled to himself. This was indeed a triumph in its way. So he was to be pitted against the new-comer—to provide brains for his party! It was *faute de mieux*, of course! but a man, when he feels really flattered, does not think of that. He had had a welcome back worth having, after all. "It is always so," he thought to himself; "a man is always best appreciated outside his own home."

But then Marie—he ought not to be an hour longer in the place without at least trying to see her.

"I have a call to make," he said; "but that will keep, if you and White really want me."

"Jump up, then—I'll drive you, and we can talk as we go along. By the way, I have to go a little out of my way first—you won't mind? I have to pick up a young lady who is staying with us, and who came in to make a visit, and whom I'm to drive back to Earl's Dene. You know something of her, perhaps?—Miss Raymond of New Court, you know."

"Indeed? My father used to know Mrs Raymond."

"No doubt; she's a capital girl. I mean her to canvass for me furiously: and as you're to do the same, I must introduce you. I wish I had an elder brother, Warden—catching votes won't be such good fun as catching trout, I fancy. However, I'm in for it now—so Lester for ever!" he said, with a laugh, and a touch to the horses that made them start off sharply. "I shall be as excited about it as my good aunt herself before it's all over. Gently, Bay—that child may be a voter's—so there's my first piece of bribery," he said, as he threw a coin to a small child that had apparently taken care to wait before crossing the street until its passage lay directly under the horses' heels. "And now, here we are."

They had turned into Market Street, and, to Mark's surprise, had stopped at the very bootmaker's shop to which he himself had been bound when he was overtaken by Lester. Surely it was not likely that Miss Raymond of New Court should buy her shoes in Denethorp, much less in Market Street. He devoutly hoped that none of the Lefort family might be looking out of the window, for he naturally wished to make his own visit in his own way.

Lester sent his groom with a message for Miss Raymond that he was at the door: and presently down came Ernest to say that she would be ready immediately.

Now Ernest was rather a sharp child, and something of a terrible one also, as sharp boys of his age are apt to be: nor had Cambridge turned Mark quite so much into a silk purse as to have rendered him unrecognisable. And so the messenger, without having delivered his message, and without any awe of Hugh, made a charge at the side of the trap at which his old acquaintance was sitting.

"Why, Ernest!" said the latter, with forced geniality, "where do you drop from? and how are they all?"

"Oh, all right. Oh, I was to say the lady will be down directly."

"And who are you, my man?" asked Lester.

"Oh, I'm Ernest."

"And who's Ernest?"

"Don't you know? Ernest Lefort."

"You know the Leforts, Warden?"

"Yes—that is—oh yes, I know them. Wait a minute, Ernest. I'll just run up for a second, Lester, if you don't mind."

"All right. By the way, would they mind my going up too? It would be rather a joke—I'll tell you why afterwards. I know one of them myself."

Now it would be doing Mark Warden supreme injustice to suppose for a moment that he was in the

least really ashamed of his humble friends in the presence of his grand acquaintance. His real desire to make his visit alone was of course founded on other reasons. But still, to guide the heir of Earl's Dene to the bootmaker's second floor was rather a downfall, after having been paraded in the streets of Denethorp as his familiar companion, and he felt it a little.

Monsieur Lefort had gone out to give his lessons, so that when the two entered, preceded by Ernest, they found only the three girls and Fleurette, who was amusing herself upon Miss Raymond's knee.

The circumstances were not favourable to a lover-like meeting between the husband and wife: and now that matters had so turned out, Mark was not altogether sorry that he and Marie were forced to meet as though they had been nothing more to each other than old acquaintance. But he read in her eyes, and in the warm rush of light and colour to her face when she saw him, that she, however much she had changed—and changed for the better—in person during these three years, was unchanged as far as he was concerned: that her heart was still as much his as if the three years had been but three hours. And for this too, so mingled were his feelings, he could not find it in his own heart to be sorry. Who can be really

disappointed or displeased at finding that a woman has remained more true to him than he has remained to her? For an instant she was once more to him the Marie of old times, and he fully answered the speech of her eyes with his own.

On their entrance Miss Raymond rose and put down Fleurette. The business of introduction seemed likely to be complicated, for there was no one in the room who was acquainted with everybody in it, and, except Hugh, everybody was surprised to see everybody else.

"Miss Lefort," said Hugh, to cut the matter short, "I am exceedingly sorry to break up so pleasant a party: but as my friend Warden would have done so in any case, I yielded to the temptation. Miss Raymond, this is Mr Warden of St Margaret's, who is going to help us in our battles."

She looked at Warden with her honest eyes, and made him a cold and formal curtsy, which, had he observed it, and had he been given to speculate about such things, would have puzzled Hugh considerably. Then, turning to Marie, and seeing her embarrassment at the unexpected visit,—

"Now, Miss Lefort, I really must go. Angélique, this is Mr Lester, Miss Clare's nephew."

Now Angélique, in spite of Miss Raymond's

kindness to her, always made a point of remembering and keeping what she considered her place as a dependant : and so for these few minutes she had retired into the background. Now, however, she emerged from her dark corner, and Lester saw her—suddenly.

The ascent into that poor and shabby lodging had been worth making, with a vengeance ! Hugh felt as a traveller in the desert would feel who should all of a sudden light upon a rose-bush in full blossom springing from the dry stones. By the side of Alice Raymond she was like a southern night beside a pale northern morning : by that of Marie, like a full moon with its faint attendant star. He was certainly no poet, nor did conscious images enter his mind : but somehow the chairs and sofas did idealise themselves almost as absurdly as if he too had thought of Arabia Petræa in connection with them. Not that the comparison is so very absurd either, for they were certainly hard enough.

Angélique must have been exceedingly stupid indeed if she had been blind to the effect that she produced upon the prince of her cousin's fairy tale, and miraculously free from vanity had she not been gratified by it. Truly if it is the early bird that picks up the worm, it is not necessarily for its own eating.

No one else, however, noticed anything. Miss

Raymond was busy with her shawl, Marie with Miss Raymond, and Mark, as usual, with himself—perhaps also a little with Marie. Still Hugh fancied, after a moment, that he must have betrayed himself, although, in fact, he only appeared to be a little awkward, as men for the most part are under any circumstances when they have just undergone the misery of a sudden introduction.

Lester.—"Are you living in—in Denethorp, Miss Lef—Mademoiselle?" ("Damn it! what an ass she must think me!")

Angélique, not showing that she thought so at all events, and in her sweetest voice.—"I am only on a visit. Miss Raymond was kind enough to let me come here while she is at Earl's Dene. This is my home, however—at least when I am not with her."

Lester.—"Oh yes—I forgot: Miss Lefort is your sister?"

Angélique.—"My cousin."

Lester.—"I suppose you heard of our interview this morning?"

Angélique.—"Oh, she gave us quite a grand account of it."

Lester, recovering himself a little.—"And abused me, no doubt?"

Angélique.—"On the contrary, I can assure you."

Marie.—"Oh, Mr Lester, what must you think of me? I have not thanked you and Miss Clare——"

Lester.—"You will do so by coming. And" (to *Angélique*, or, more accurately, at her) "you also—if—that is——"

Angélique.—"I am no artist, I am ashamed to say."

Miss Raymond.—"Don't believe her, Hugh. She does everything."

Angélique, to herself.—"I wonder why she calls him Hugh? But I should have known if there was anything." Aloud—"Badly, Miss Raymond was going to add."

Miss Raymond.—"Indeed I was not, though. If Mr Lester were not in a hurry to get away, I would punish you by condemning you to the harpsichord on the spot."

Angélique.—"Oh, pray, Miss Raymond——"

Lester, forgetting all about Warden, White, and everything that he ought to have remembered.—
"Would you? Might I ask?"

Angélique, throwing him a look of private and special complaisance.—"I would much rather you would excuse me, indeed. I am really not——"

Lester.—"But I am sure that—will you try?"

Angélique, with a look of the same kind as before, but tempered by a half-smile.—"But perhaps you do not care about music?"

Lester.—"But I do indeed. There is nothing that I care for so much."

Miss Raymond, opening the harpsichord.—"Oh, Hugh, that's just what you said last night about hunting! There, *Angélique*—you see you will have to do it."

Angélique.—"I wish you had not raised Mr Lester's expectations. However, I will do what I can to dissipate them. Ah, you have no doubt heard Miss Raymond herself?"

Miss Raymond, laughing.—"If he had, do you think I should give him the chance of hearing you? I am not quite so careless of my reputation."

And so *Angélique*, having displayed the proper amount of unwillingness, sat down and sang.

What she chose to sing is of no consequence, nor how she sang it. Lester knew nothing about music. Englishmen in those days knew as little about it as they do now, and cared about it even less. But nevertheless he was soon lost in a heaven in which he forgot every man in the world and every woman but one—in which he became so lost indeed as to forget even his horses, which were impatiently pawing the stones before the door.

CHAPTER VIII.

At last, however, when the one song had grown into many, the visit came to an end. Lester had, when in his ignorance of what was to come and on the spur of the moment he proposed to amuse himself by following up his adventure of the morning, intended that it should last about two minutes: and to him, indeed, it seemed to have lasted not a second longer. In truth, however, the church clock, unheard by him, had twice chimed the hour. Miss Raymond had been in no hurry to run away, for she enjoyed the slightly Bohemian character of the whole thing, and was easily amused: and Mark, though he was not enjoying himself at all, could not under the circumstances betray his desire to cut the visit short.

When the three visitors departed, Lester carrying away with him a look, sharp as a sword but soft as velvet, thrown to him from the dark eyes of

Angélique, which had the effect of filling his whole heart and of raising his spirits to a delightful point of mild fever, then said that young lady herself to her cousin,—

“*Eh bien, chère enfant!* I congratulate you on that worm of yours!”

“What—Mr Lester?”

“Who but Mr Lester, of course? He is really a very good-looking boy. And so that is the heir of Earl's Dene?”

“I really do not know. He is Miss Clare's nephew. Yes, I suppose he is.”

“And has she any other nephews, or any people of that sort?”

“I believe not.”

“And what do you think of my Miss Alice?”

“Of Miss Raymond? Oh, she is quite charming, and so kind!”

“Yes, she is, no doubt. Suppose there should be a match between them?”

“I am sure they would suit each other admirably.”

“My dear Marie, what a child you are!”

“Why?”

“Why? because you are. And now, what has your old friend Mark Warden had to say for himself? Why, how you colour!”

"Do I? I'm sure I didn't know it. I am very glad he is back again."

"He has certainly improved—he looks like a man: much more of a man than young Lester. He was a very disagreeable boy, though."

"Angélique!"

"Now, dearest, please don't scold me, or look at me through your eyebrows like that. I have no doubt he is perfection now. Do you know, I feel quite in high spirits. Do you think of going to Earl's Dene to-morrow morning?"

"To-morrow? I don't know. Perhaps one had better not to-morrow. I wish Mr Lester had not made such a point of my going."

"Oh, Marie, what an old prude you are!"

"I think it might be better not, perhaps. It was altogether rather a fuss about nothing."

"Very likely, dear. But then one thing comes of another: and nothing doesn't come from nothing always. Now I am sure we have had a very pleasant morning party, and that would never have been but for your going to the park. And then it would seem so ungrateful of you not to go now."

"I hope not. I can't help thinking that the whole thing has gone far enough. As you say, we have had a very pleasant morning party——"

"Well?"

"And let that be the end of it."

"Why, do you take Mr Lester for a wolf, and us for two innocent lambs? I am not a lamb, I assure you, and don't mean to be: and he seems to me to be very harmless. And Miss Raymond here too!"

"I daresay you are right. But still—— Come, now we are alone, tell me something about your letter from Félix."

"There—you may read it if you like."

"What—all?"

"Why not? There are no secrets."

And so Marie took the letter, and read as follows, while Angélique returned to her favourite window, and amused herself with the first two cantos of 'Don Juan,' which she had brought down with her:—

"LONDON, *June —th.*

"DEAREST,—I am in England—in your land! In mine too, for since you left Paris, France has been my land of exile—England my true home. Are you surprised? But you cannot be surprised that my body should have followed my soul. Do not be surprised if it follows you more closely still, for your absence has cheated me of the reward of seeing you. Shall you be long gone? When shall you be back?"

If Paris became a desert to me when you left it, what must this London be? I am angry with the sun for shining where my own sun is not—I can only hope that it is the herald of your return. Is it so?

“The first thing I did on arriving, before doing or thinking about anything, was to call in the Square of Portman. What a gloomy house! That also seemed to feel its desolation. There, after much difficulty—for the words ‘I love you’ help me not much, and of your tongue I know no more—I learned where you now are, and that you are so many leagues away. Then I carried a letter of introduction to a friend of M. Prosper, who, as you know, has friends everywhere. I found him at the theatre, where he is director of the music. He received me well, and thinks I did not wrong to come here as an artist. There is room enough for foreign musicians, he tells me, since the peace, and he will be able to get me an engagement either at his own house or at some other before my purse is empty. You will say, perhaps, this does not sound very grand. But what would you? Rome was not built in a day, and I am not afraid were London ten times as large. Do I not love you? and is not that enough to become great—is it not more than enough?

“I have so much to say to you, or rather I want

to hear you say so much to me! For indeed I have but little to say but that I love you more than ever, were that possible—but love makes me afraid, makes me doubt, though I know your truth so well: I want to hear once more from your own lips that you have not changed since the time when Paris was not a desert to me.”

“Am I to go on?” asked Marie.

“If you are not *ennuyée*,” answered her cousin, calmly.

“I tremble so much when I think what kind of life is yours—not solitary like mine. If I knew not your soul so well I should often despair, even now, when I think how much you are above me. For that alone I *will* become great, and that soon. And music to me is so entirely filled with you that how can I help being inspired?”

“Of course as yet I know no one here, nor do I care to know anybody or see anybody but one, and she is invisible. Pray send me a line to say when I may hope for my winter to be over, and for my summer to come. If it is long first—but do not let it be long!”

“Longing for you, for anything from you, dearest Angélique, your wholly devoted

“FÉLIX.”

"Is it not nonsense?" asked Angélique, as she took back the letter.

But Marie did not think it nonsense by any means, and she answered by an embrace.

"Poor fellow!" Angélique continued. "Yes, he is very good, but then he sometimes is very tiresome."

Marie stared.

It did not, however, strike Angélique herself that she had said anything very surprising, so she did not observe the effect of her speech. "You see," she went on, "he is very amiable and very clever, at least as a musician, and I like him very much—better than any one I know, except you—and when I come out he would do admirably for a husband, if I am to fall into that line: and he is quite good-looking enough, and he is a gentleman, although he is only a fiddler——"

"Angélique!" This seemed to be Marie's limit to reproach.

"Marie!" replied Angélique, imitating her tone. "You don't expect me to find perfection, do you? And, after all, if it comes to that, I don't consider myself hopelessly engaged."

"Not engaged?"

"Of course we are, after a fashion. But then there are so many ways——"

"My *dear* Angélique!"

"Oh, you need not be afraid: I do not mean to break his heart. I shall marry him, no doubt, if he ever makes enough to keep us both from starving. You would not have me be a clog upon him, would you? And if it is not to be, why, it won't be, that's all."

It will be gathered from this conversation that Angélique was the elder of the two, not only in years, but in some other things besides. But then she had seen a great deal more of the world.

"Oh, Marie," she said, "I do wish I were a man!"

"Why?"

"Because I could marry you."

But Marie did not smile. She said, crossly for her, though not for any one else, "I know you do not mean a single word you have been saying."

"Of course not—who ever does? But I really should like to have you for my wife, Marie. But men are such simpletons. Come—don't let us quarrel any more. I feel inclined for a walk."

And so for a walk they prepared themselves—Angélique in the very best of spirits, Marie rather sadly. At all events her cousin had puzzled her considerably.

Nor is it certain that such sadness as she felt arose wholly from what seemed to her her cousin's

unnatural way of speaking of her lover. That, she simply did not understand: and although it jarred upon her, she never dreamed that somehow it was not all right in reality. It was that, without knowing it, she had been disappointed in Mark Warden—if, indeed, “disappointed” is not too strong a word.

Not that she realised any such feeling. On the contrary, she was proud of his success, proud of his apparent friendship with Lester: for the people of Earl's Dene were the aristocracy, almost the royalty, of her limited world, and, paradoxical as it may sound, it is just those who know least of the world who are most impressed by rank and wealth. She was proud, also, of his improved appearance and bearing, and she was proud that her old belief in him had been justified. But behind all this not unreasonable pride there lurked a feeling of the existence of a want or loss of sympathy—that most intangible and indescribable of feelings which is always most strong when it is most intangible and indescribable. It was not that he had seemed cold and undemonstrative. He was cold and undemonstrative by nature, and perhaps in this lay no small part of his influence over her: for reserve, inasmuch as it implies strength, is the great secret by which

anything like real influence over a woman is both gained and secured. Besides, there had as yet been no opportunity for any display of warmth, seeing that the two had met not only before others, but before strangers. But still she had found his manner towards her not such as it might have been in the presence of a hundred strangers, although she could not have specified a single instance in which he could have spoken or acted differently. The fact is, that he could not under any circumstances have spoken or acted differently: and had he been in reality altogether unchanged, no want or loss would have suggested itself. But as the want did exist, it would have equally made itself felt in any case.

It is really impossible to put in words, which are always, even at best, terribly gross and hard, the faint suggestion of another unconscious feeling that found its way into the heart of Marie: for while words are strong in proportion to their direct strength and plainness, feelings are strong in proportion to their obscurity. To attempt to express their shadowy *nuances*, even in poetry, is to risk trespassing on the province of another art: for though Art, in a very high sense, is doubtless one and indivisible, still, practically, its branches have very fixed and definite limits, which ought to be, and indeed to some extent must

be, observed. Now, unfortunately, that form of art which works with words, while it is not less noble than other forms, and while it can, in many respects, soar far higher than the others, is in this respect the most limited of all. It cannot affect the heart but through the logic of the mind—a terrible drawback when it is necessary that the heart should speak to the heart without the intervention of any logical process or logical symbols. Musicians and painters are far better off in this matter: they may reach the soul through the senses alone. The eye and the ear have no need of reason in order to understand: they need but to see and hear. But what can a word do, after all, with its fixed and inflexible definiteness, speaking to no sense, and only suggesting in the first instance a cold, gross sort of accuracy, which is absolutely hostile to the expression of emotion?

The application of all this is, that were one to say that the perusal of her cousin's letter produced a sensation of jealousy in the heart of Marie, a word would be employed that would be as inappropriate as possible: and yet, at the same time, any other known word would be more inappropriate still. Jealousy is a feeling of which, accurately speaking, she was utterly incapable: and had she been capable of it, it would never have been where Angélique, her

heroine of heroines, was concerned. But is it just possible to conceive of a sort of jealousy—there is no help for it, the word must be used—which conveys no suggestion or taint of anything hateful or degrading, even although its cause is fanciful and even absurd? In the infinite series of emotions there must be some such feeling, though the note that represents it may have no place in any recognised scale. Indeed some such thing must exist, for Marie experienced it. The letter had supplied her with a material foundation upon which to fix her floating half-thoughts about her husband. She was able to make an unconscious contrast. And yet, somehow or other, he gained something by the contrast too. And so, for the first time in her life, her heart was really troubled, and she did not know why.

But it was, in truth, all plain enough. She, like her husband, had not exactly been standing still all these years.

CHAPTER IX.

BUT Angélique, though excited, was certainly not troubled in any disagreeable sense. Not that her thoughts and dreams were always of the most agreeable kind : for, thanks to her friends the Raymonds, she had seen something of the world, and was very naturally dissatisfied with her position in it. She could not avoid holding the doctrine that things in general were not quite as they ought to be. No one likes to own that he or she does not belong, by right of nature, to an aristocracy of some kind or other, and every one believes that his or her own kind is the best and truest. Miss Clare would not have agreed with her : but there is something, at least, to be said in favour of the idea favoured by Mademoiselle Angélique, that beauty and talent are not in their right places when they serve only to attract penniless fiddlers, and to waste themselves upon one who, being, socially speaking, nobody, was unable to

outshine by their means the plainest and stupidest of the class to which Miss Clare and Miss Raymond belonged. She could not admire a condition of things in which the maid had to outshine the mistress in vain: in which the New Courts and other good things of life belonged to the less clever: and in which Fortune, unlike the shepherd of *Ida*, threw the golden fruit to the less beautiful. . . .

She was quite sufficiently quick to judge of the motives of the people about her: and she did not suppose that Miss Raymond had been invited to be a guest at Earl's Dene for nothing. Indeed, had she herself not been given to draw conclusions from what she saw, the never-ceasing gossip of the town, always busy with the affairs of everybody, would have drawn them for her. Miss Clare had not entertained a visitor, save on matters of business, for years: and now, just when her heir had come of age, and was at home, she was entertaining one who was young, beautiful, and, above all, rich. Within the last few hours Earl's Dene and New Court had been married many times over by many tongues. A great many things passed through the brain of Angélique while Hugh Lester was standing over her at the harpsichord, and set her wits wandering in the country of infinite possibilities—a process with which coquetry

had in reality but very little to do. Marie would have stared, indeed, had she been able to read the last thought that passed through her cousin's mind before she fell asleep, for it was nothing short of this:—

“And suppose . . . and suppose that I were Mrs Lester of Earl's Dene . . . Lady Lester of Earl's Dene . . . Angélique, Countess of Dene-thorp . . .”

And where she would have arrived in her dreams heaven knows, were it not that waking thoughts and dreams seldom have much in common. Perhaps she experienced in them the fate of Alnascar: perhaps they were with Félix.

But enough for the present of girls and their dreams and fancies. The war between Whigs and Tories, between Earl's Dene and the cloth-mills, had begun. Before, however, entering upon a subject of such importance, yet one word more must be bestowed upon Angélique, for her letter from Félix required an answer. In the following copy of it, the words placed in brackets appeared only in the rough draft, and were in her fair copy altered to those that immediately follow them. It will be seen that there are not many such alterations: for she was an excellent secretary, as well for herself as for Miss Raymond.—

"23 MARKET STREET, DENETHORP, —*th.*

"MY DEAR FÉLIX,—I own I *was* surprised to learn from your letter that you were [so near me] in London. Is it quite prudent of you to have taken such a sudden step? But I suppose you considered it well, and acted under good advice. It would be most painful to me to think you had acted [thus on my account] otherwise. Did you consult M. Prosper first? If you did, you have not told me what he said. I am very much afraid [as you say it will be a disappointment to you] that I shall not be able to return to town immediately, or even soon. Miss Raymond has not yet said anything about coming back, and of course my movements depend entirely upon hers. She has been good enough to do without me while she is here, and I am staying with my uncle and cousins [and am enjoying my visit to them very much]. Of course I shall be glad to see you. But do not think of coming to see me here—it would never do. This I mean *really*. You must stay in London and work for *your own* sake, and show a little patience for *mine*. I should be very [angry] vexed, indeed, if you were to come here: and so you will not, I am sure. Indeed I do not see how you could, as you are looking for an engagement: and you *ought* to get one as soon as you can, and not lose

your chances for a mere *caprice*. If you have made a useful friend in this person to whom M. Prosper has introduced you, you must not lose him, if you really mean to be as successful as I am sure you may be if you like.—With all best wishes, believe me your affectionate friend,

“ANGÉLIQUE LEFORT.”

Never was colder letter kissed. But then wisdom always seems cold, and Angélique was rapidly growing wise. It is one thing for a young girl, with her character scarcely formed, to indulge her first fancies by falling in love, or by imagining that she falls in love, with a kind of romance hero, especially if she had been touched by the *mania Byronica*: but it is a very different thing for the same girl, when months of youth, which correspond to years of later life, have defined her feelings and made her capable of forming something like a real purpose, to keep faithful to mere romance. It is not at all wonderful that, in the day of the Medoras, the Gulnares, and their tribe, a very little mystery should have been able to go a long way in attracting her fancy. Even now, when Laras and Conrads are gone out of fashion, mystery is notoriously by no means a bad line for a man to take if he wishes to be thought of with

interest by a very young girl whose dreaming days are not yet over. When, therefore, Mademoiselle Angélique was really young, the young artist, who chose to wear his hair long, who talked in the language of romance, and yet of sincerity, about love, art, and so forth : who came from a land of hills and forests, and who preferred, as a matter of taste, to make love to her secretly, and who shared in that absurd but not unamiable kind of hypocrisy which leads very young men to like to make themselves out to be very much worse morally than they really are—had quite enough points in his favour to touch her fancy if not her heart. She would have preferred, no doubt, that they had been respectively sultana and pirate, instead of only being *dame de compagnie* and fiddler : but still imagination will do a great deal in such cases—a great deal more than change a fiddler into a pirate of pirates, and a *dame de compagnie* into a sultana of sultanas. The unromantic Marie would have been safe, in all probability, from the influence of a real and genuine Lara : but the violinist was unconventional enough in his ways, singular enough in his appearance, and even mysterious enough in his origin, to pass in her cousin's eyes for a sufficiently good imitation of the real thing—as a peg on which she might hang up her

fancies to dry. For she had thought a great deal about love in those days—as much as she was getting to think about marriage now.

There are one or two proverbs that contain more truth than falsehood: and one of them, unhappily, is, that familiarity breeds contempt. Though mystery is a good key, it is a very bad lock: it does very well to open the door of a heart, but it is by no means well adapted to keep it safe and secure. This must be done by sheer strength: and of sheer strength, overmuch talk about love and art, and the youthful affectations of long locks and mild wickedness, are in no wise symptoms—at least not of the sort of strength that is required to hold for ever a woman who had opened her eyes to the fact that the good things of the real world are by no means to be despised.

But, once more, it is the eve of battle: and yet do we linger in ladies' bowers? Nay, rather

“Sound, sound the clarion, fill the fife:”

and in fact the clarion—from Redchester, at eighteen-pence a-day and as much beer as he can swallow—is sounding to the fray: nor are local drums and fifes wanting to beat and whistle with a heroic disregard of light and shade, of time and tune. Words, as hard as bullets, and almost as telling, are hurled about

the place incessantly, and every now and then missiles that are harder still: standards are displayed, union-jack against union-jack, and motto against motto: rosettes begin to enliven frieze and broadcloth, on this side with hue of heaven—on that, with the colour of flowery fields: and the armies rush together in a shower of gold and silver, as though Denethorp were Danaë, wooed by rival Joves. In a word, it is a contested election of the good old days, when men used to hit at least as hard as they do now, and far more openly.

He who has seen, he who has heard, may picture to himself the outward phenomena of the long exciting weeks that preceded the nomination of a burgess to represent in Parliament the borough of Denethorp. Mr Prescott came down from London, open-handed, to represent the cause for which, according to the orators who held forth at the Chequers, "Hampden died on the field and Sydney on the scaffold." He made an admirable candidate—far better, it must be confessed, than Hugh. He was, though not an old man, an old hand at such things: and if he was not actually much more wealthy than Madam Clare, and if he did not spend more freely—that was impossible—his resources were much more readily available, and he spent

with greater ostentation and *éclat*. He, moreover, had no local prestige to lose. If he won, it did not matter how he won: and if he lost, he lost no more than that one particular contest. And then he was the popular candidate, and had the noise on his side—and that, in an old-fashioned contest, was always a great point in a man's favour. In a state of things in which the sanest of men becomes part of an insane crowd, noise creates sympathy. The ordinary man always likes to add his voice to the loudest chorus: and so "Prescot for ever!" was shouted forth much more often and much more loudly than the similar cry that was given for Lester. But, above all, while the latter was an untried boy, the banker from London was a man of mark and weight, with whose name newspaper politicians were familiar: and while Lester spoke only like a gentleman, and that badly, he spoke like an orator—like a mob-orator it may be, but still like an orator. Altogether he was the very type of a popular candidate: and his party in Denethorp could not have brought down a better man.

Still Hugh had his advantages. A feeling of duty is in itself a source of strength, even in an election: and he honestly believed himself to be the champion of the right. Besides, he was, after

all, fighting a stranger upon his own ground—always an immense advantage in every sort of war: for in this respect the truest of proverbs shows its weak side, and familiarity breeds not contempt but confidence. He was popular also, and his manner of canvass was such as to draw upon him no personal ill-will, even from his opponents. That was all reserved for Madam Clare, who drew upon herself a great deal of it, and not without real cause. She made no pretence of concealing her cards, and victory would be of little worth to her unless it was carried by a high hand.

She was, however, wise enough not to trust entirely to herself and her prestige. It was not without good reason that she placed great reliance upon Mr George White, her Denethorp solicitor, who, though unused to election contests, was not unequal to them, as Mr Prescott's more practised agent very soon discovered. And in no way did Miss Clare's lieutenant-general prove his wisdom and discretion better than in first getting hold of Mark Warden, and in afterwards gradually promoting him to be his own first lieutenant. Mr White was not a man of many words, but this is the opinion of Mark that he, after a week or two of work, expressed to Mr Brown:—

"If we were fighting for that fellow Warden instead of young Lester, by the Lord! I'd just go to bed at once, and order myself not to be called till after the poll."

The practical man, young as he was, and new to the work, found his labour congenial—far more congenial than he had found Sophocles and Newton. He was the only man on the blue side who could fight the invader with his own peculiar weapons on equal terms. He canvassed indefatigably, and not in too scrupulous a manner: he spoke often and well: and though, as an orator, he was rather apt to talk over the heads of his audience, he thereby gained no little reputation for himself. A mob is always rather flattered by having addressed to it what it does not quite understand. And then, too, he had the advantage over Prescott of being well up in all local allusions: and he had the prestige of having not only been born and bred in the place, but of having become an honour to it besides—a prestige that he and White worked to the uttermost. Perhaps, after all, the cry of "Lester for ever!" was only less loud because for the name of "Lester" was so often substituted that of "Warden."

Madam Clare was not slow to see how things

were going, and she became not a little jealous. But she made him a welcome visitor at Earl's Dene whenever he had occasion to call there, and treated him as his merits and services deserved. Miss Raymond too, who had caught the election fever in its most intense form—so much so as to become sometimes quite angry with her candidate for not coming out so strongly as he ought—came to treat Warden as the hero of the hour: indeed she heard his praises sung by all around her so often and so loudly that, being a very different sort of young lady from what Miss Clare had been, she quite got rid of the impression that he had somehow made upon her at their first meeting. It was true that he could not ride across country—but then he could talk: and even with more enthusiastic amazons than Alice Raymond the tongue of silver outweighs the best hand that ever lay on bridle, when its owner knows how to use it discreetly. As for Marie, she grew ten times more proud of him than ever, and took such warm though ignorant interest in all he did, that he would have been more than man had he not felt the old chain renew itself in spite of everything.

And then, too, in those exciting, harassing weeks he needed rest sometimes, more especially as the

life he was now leading was not well calculated to restore his nervous tone. And where should he find rest? At home? His father now talked nothing but politics, and Mr Brown, of whom he had to see quite enough during the day, had now become a more frequent evening visitor than ever. At Earl's Dene? Nothing but politics there also: and besides, when he went there he had to exert himself, and to sustain his reputation. Where, in fact, should he find rest but where he ought to find it—that is to say, with Marie?

Nor was he the only visitor at Monsieur Lefort's. He generally confined himself to calling there in the evening: but when he did chance to go there in the daytime, he more than once found Hugh Lester neglecting his interests for a while to hear Mademoiselle Angélique sing.

This sounds but a slight matter, nor did any one concerned see any harm in it. To Marie it would have seemed the most natural thing possible had all the county crowded into the little room to hear the music that she held to be the most beautiful in the world: and, girl as she was, she was not one of those who cannot see two people together without at once leaping to extreme conclusions. Monsieur Lefort did not trouble his head about it—he had

other things to think about than such nonsense. Warden could not have seen any danger in it, or he would not rather have encouraged these visits of Lester's than otherwise, with a view to getting his candidate out of the way while he worked to better purpose without him. Lester, one may assume, did not: nor Angélique, one may hope, when one remembers the existence of Félix. What Madam Clare would have thought about it is another thing: but, fortunately for her repose of mind, her nephew did not include his visits to No. 23 in his daily journal of the progress of his canvass. He always had plenty to tell her without alluding to such a trifle.

But the result of it was, that more and more he left Warden to bear the burden and heat of the day alone, and that the latter daily advanced in the trust and confidence of Earl's Dene. Miss Clare did not like him overmuch; but she trusted him and was grateful to him, and that, with her, meant something better than liking. At all events, if he was setting sail under false colours, it was with a fair and favourable wind.

CHAPTER X.

It must not be supposed, however, in spite of what has been said, that the comings-in and goings-out of so important a person as Hugh Lester were not closely observed by those to whom they were of no consequence at all. Nor must it be supposed that even so unapproachable a person as Madam Clare was by her greatness protected altogether from the insults of her enemies.

One day, when she and her guest were being driven by the family coachman in a dignified manner along the High Street, a shabby fellow, conspicuously decorated with the popular colours of green and orange, tossed into her lap the following production of the popular muse, written on a scrap of paper as disreputable-looking as the marksman himself:—

“tak care tak care
o maddom C——e

& pra mor carfull Be
for Denthorp *Quean*
is not a *erl* nor a *dean*
but No. 23

“be where be where
then maddom *C—e*
yor rain is getting shortt & shortt
No longer yew
rools master *H—w*
not now but mis *L—t*”

The first impulse of the great lady was, seeing the colours that the man wore, to throw it back contemptuously into the street unopened: but Miss Raymond, with a more popular tact, affected a curiosity to see it.

“Will you not read it first?” she asked.

“It is sure to be some scurrility or other. No.”

But she had hesitated: and so she did read it. Then she did not throw it into the street, but put it quietly into her pocket, dirty as it was.

“And may I not see it too?” asked Miss Raymond.

“No, my dear: it is not fit for you to see.”

She spoke gravely, and her guest, seeing that she was annoyed, said no more about it.

If Miss Clare had only known what was going on at No. 23 at that very moment!

Marie was generally in the room when Hugh called, but not always. She was not an idle person : she was her father's zealous and willing housekeeper, and the children's nurse and governess besides. If her cousin, who was at home for a holiday, had time and leisure to entertain visitors, she had not. She liked to see Hugh, with whom she had become very good friends : but duty had to come before pleasure, and as she liked to have her evenings free, for her husband's sake, she had always plenty to do in the day. On this occasion, whatever she might be doing, she was certainly not in the room, which was occupied by Hugh and Angélique only. The latter was sitting at the harpsichord, but was not playing, unless playing can be held to consist in striking an occasional chord, or playing scraps of imaginary tunes with one hand.

Hugh sat close by her side.

Now it is very difficult, in speaking of the outward actions of men and women, to be altogether serious. But, in all seriousness of speech, and with no underlying thought of ridicule, let it not be imagined that the conduct of Hugh Lester in this matter is in the least degree to be regarded as absurd. It was only far too natural.

To go back for an instant to the occasion of his

first meeting with Angélique—to the date of the beginning of the danger.

Now, generally speaking, a first interview is seldom really dangerous. If the woman is not beautiful, the reason is obvious enough: and if she is, the man will be disappointed, as in the case of a really beautiful work of art, by finding that she is not like or equal to what he expected to see: and he will most probably light upon her first in the midst of appropriate and harmonious surroundings that temper anything like the violence of effect that lies in contrast. But in this case, Hugh, young, impulsive, and heart-free, had come, as upon an unexpected discovery of his own, without warning—in the midst of poor and utterly unharmonious surroundings, and in the company of other women who might have been selected for the very purpose of acting as foils to her—upon the most beautiful woman that, as it seemed to his eyes, he had ever seen: and so the surprise, the admiration, and the pride of discovery, all blended with the charm of a subtle sort of romance which, to him at least, seemed to hang over the situation, and, brought about by the absolute power of beauty, were quite enough to render unnecessary any far-fetched theory about the nature of what people call love at first sight. What

he felt then was not love: but it was what must always grow into love of some kind or other, unless absence or a miracle intervene.

But no miracle happened, nor did Hugh keep away from the flame which Angélique, for her part, did not hide under a bushel. Her coquetry was not of that sort that has no purpose in it: and though in the comedy of human life the coquette, pure and simple, is about the most charming of characters, yet, when she is capable of purpose, she is apt to turn comedy into tragedy. The ornaments of *fêtes* and balls, whose coquetry belongs rather to the pleasant farce of human life than even to its comedy, are harmless enough: they, with their little artifices that need deceive nobody, are no more really dangerous than birds and flowers: but Angélique seemed likely to take far higher rank in the profession—to prove herself one with whom a Hugh Lester was no more in a position to cope than a fish surrounded by the net is able to struggle against the hands that draw it shoreward. The small fry, small in purse or in rank, may slip through the meshes, or some gigantic sea-monster may by sheer size and strength succeed in leaping over or breaking through them: but the good, honest, eatable fish is just the creature for whom the net is made: and for him

there is no return to the sea. But still, the vain security of a stupid fish as the net surrounds it is not a pleasant sight in itself: and, in the same way, the sight of a human fish caught in a net from which there is no escaping is not in itself comic, though it is often grotesque enough. After all, whether it was love at first sight or no, it was first love that Hugh Lester was now experiencing: and first love is never absurd to those who will know it no more, even though, like all feelings that are pure and honest, the thought of it may justly enough bring a smile to the heart as well as to the lips.

At all events he was sitting now in the garden of his Armida, while the crusade was carrying itself on without the sword of him who should have been foremost of all. His attitude was expressive, for he was leaning downwards and forwards towards the enchantress, his eyes trying vainly to read hers, which were fixed modestly upon the keys. They had kept silence for a minute or more—he from the fulness of his heart, and she because she chose.

People are certainly provokingly perverse. It would have been so easy and natural, one would have thought, for Miss Clare's nephew—it saves trouble to give him that title at once, without perpetual explanation of the real relationship between

them—to have fallen in love, if he must fall in love, with Alice Raymond, who was pretty enough, good enough, amiable enough, well-born enough, and the rest of it, to satisfy even his aunt's fastidiousness, and whose tastes agreed so well with his own. Nor is there any reason to think that Miss Raymond would have proved unconquerably cruel had he thus proved himself wise. Any man of experience, any man who knew the world, would have known in a moment which of the two to choose. Yes—but, after all, who really wishes to find too much knowledge of the world at twenty-one? There is something not ludicrous, but almost pathetic, in the apparent necessity that first love should always take an unconventional form—in its almost invariably being in the nature of a protest against the gross and unromantic reason of the world—in the way in which it almost always fixes itself upon an object which either ought not to be desired or is impossible to obtain, or which is, at the least, strange and unreasonable. All the world over, the page loves the queen, the king the beggar-maid, the sinner the saint, and, too often, the saint the sinner. When a couple is well matched, one may very safely wager that both husband and wife have memories with which each other has nothing to do. Happily, as a

rule, no man marries her whom first he loves : and when he does, there is considerable fear that his first love will not prove to be his last.

"Angélique," said Hugh, at last—his pronunciation of her name, by the way, was not exactly Parisian—"will you not give me just a word—just to let me——"

"But do you know what you have done?" she said gravely, raising her eyes for a moment—"that you have asked me——"

"To be my wife. What else should I ask you, when that is all I want in the world?"

"Are you in earnest?"

"What can I say or do to make you believe it?"

"No, I cannot. Think of what I am—remember——"

"That I love you, Angélique."

"That I have, that I am, nothing—and that you——"

"Nothing! when you are all that I love!"

"A poor, friendless girl——"

"Shall not I be your friend, then? Would I not make myself everything to you?"

"Whom the world"—a scornful stress on the word—"whom the world will say caught you——"

"The world! What do I care for a hundred

worlds? I shall be all the more proud to love you in its face. You are my world, Angélique."

"But I too am proud; and——"

"And yet you fear the world!"

"Not for myself—no, heaven knows! But——"

"For whom, then? Can you mean that you fear for me?" His head approached hers more closely still.

She allowed him to draw his own conclusion.

"But your career?" she went on.

"What career?"

"Are you not going into Parliament? Are you not——"

"Parliament!"

"Oh, I suppose——"

"Suppose only that I love you—suppose only that my career will be to make you happy! I will do what you please: your career shall be mine——"

"And Miss Clare!"

Hugh was silent for a moment. Then he said,—

"Miss Clare has been more than a mother to me. She, I know, only desires my happiness, and she will welcome my wife as her daughter." But he did not speak quite so confidently as before.

"I am afraid of Miss Clare—Hugh." The little hesitating pause before his own Christian name gave point to her first utterance of it.

"And if she did object, which is impossible, I am my own master, I suppose?"

"But you are not master of Earl's Dene."

"Angélique!"

His tone put her in mind of Marie, and she smiled to herself.

"Do not mistake me," she replied: "I am not thinking of Earl's Dene. *I* could be happy in a cottage. I have been brought up to earn my own bread, and am willing to earn it. No—do not ask me to give up the life of toil to which I have always looked forward: I shall contrive not to be unhappy, never fear! But I will not stand in your way. You shall not run the risk of losing a single acre of Earl's Dene for me."

"Angélique! When I would lose a hundred Earl's Denes for a word from you! Is that all? If Miss Clare shows that all her affection for me has been so hollow, the tie between her and me must be broken. There are bounds to the duty of a real son to a real mother. I will not lose you, Angélique, if I lose everything for you. Ought not a man to leave both father and mother for his wife? And what would everything in the world be to me without you? And you should not suffer. I would toil for you—I am strong enough: and let Earl's Dene go to the devil."

This was not in itself particularly eloquent : but if he could only have managed to speak in the same manner and with the same energy to the electors of Denethorp, Prescott and Warden would have gained but few laurels.

"But Miss Clare will not object," he went on, after a short pause. "I must know her better than you can. She will love you, when she knows you, nearly as much as I do. She would not be able to help it, Angélique. But do not let us talk of that—I know I am not worthy to look at one like you : but I do love you more than anybody else ever can, and I will try all I can to make you happy—to make you like me. And don't think of me as if the world mattered a straw to me. I hate it all. I only wish I were as poor as a rat."

"But, indeed—indeed I ought not."

"Ought not to like me?"

"No, indeed ! how can one help what one feels ?
But——"

"Then you can, you do, love me, Angélique ?"

"Oh, I ought not, indeed—but what can I say ?"

And so, instead of saying anything, she allowed her lover to place his arm round her, and once more to draw his own conclusion.

This was one great point gained : but it was not

everything. In spite of his boasted knowledge of his aunt's character, she had, or thought she had, a much better comprehension of it, even although his was derived from long intimacy, and hers from hearsay and guesswork. She also thought it just as likely as not that Hugh, in his joy and confidence, and as a matter of duty, would go straight to his aunt at once, and let her know of the important step he had just taken: and this would not suit her at all. She did not wish even her uncle or her cousin to know anything of the matter except at her own time and in her own way.

Beginning with the less important point of the two,—

"Dear Hugh," she said, "I am so confused with all this that I do not know what I am doing or what I am saying. Marie will be coming in soon—don't let her know anything: I will tell her myself when I am more quiet. So you really think that Miss Clare will not mind? I should be so unhappy if I thought she would. I could not bear to think that I was the cause of your quarrelling with your best friend."

"Why, dearest," Hugh was beginning: when Marie came in, carrying a note in her hand.

Angélique was vexed and looked it, but recovered herself quickly, after a warning look at Hugh.

"Ah, Miss Marie," said the latter, who was not able to compose himself quite so suddenly, "I was afraid I should not have seen you this morning. And, as it is, I shall have to make the same speech serve for good-morning and good-bye." He looked at his watch. "By Jove! I really must be off. I ought to have met White an hour ago. I suppose it's too late now, though, but I must try."

"If it is really too late you had better stay," said Marie. "But perhaps you will learn from this," and she gave him the note. "It has just come from Mr White's for you. I suppose they knew you were here."

"DEAR LESTER," he read,—*"Come over to White's office at once, if you can. We have been waiting for you an hour, and I have just heard where you are: and—you will, I am sure, excuse advice given in your interest—I think you had better not make quite so many visits at the Leforts just at present. You know how absurdly people here will talk. I write this in case you cannot come over now, for I have to leave the town for a day or two.—Yours most truly,*
"M. W."

Here was an opportunity for him to begin flying in the face of the world! But the childish thought

was but momentary, and he took his leave at once, to Angélique's extreme annoyance. She had but half done her work after all. She dreaded a premature explosion of her mine, for she had the very smallest opinion of her lover's discretion.

By the time that the latter reached the office of White & Son, Warden had left it: and as the lawyer was for the moment engaged, Mr Brown, as a polite attention, placed in his hands a bundle of the last election squibs, printed on orange-coloured paper, to amuse him while he waited.

Most of them were silly enough: but there was one that was by no means silly, whatever else it was.

It was a copy of verses directed against Mark Warden, and about the grossest thing of the kind that Hugh had ever seen: indeed it was wonderful how the satirist had been so ingenious as to find so many holes in the coat of one whose life had apparently been so immaculate, and to discover so many foibles in a character that was so unusually exempt from them. But his very strength and consistency were so treated as to appear in the guise of weakness: his very youth was turned into a stumbling-block, and his talent into an offence. He was made to look like a selfish hypocrite, cold-hearted and cold-minded, seeking only his own ends, and with-

out any better end than the most sordid sort of success. But this is to say little, for in satire form and manner are everything. The whole thing was done with the hand of a master, and was crowded with cruel wit and savage humour. The blows were dealt unsparingly, and every point was made to tell. It was evident that the enemy, if they had been rivalled in eloquence, had determined not to be outdone with the pen, and that they had got hold of a man of nothing short of genius to write their lampoons. Moreover, the wit and the humour were by no means too subtle to be appreciated by the coarsest and most stupid of readers. It was as though the ghost of Swift himself had suddenly taken an interest in the Denethorp election, and had changed its politics. But the strangest thing about it was, that it was evidently written by some one who had a more intimate knowledge of Warden than any one at Denethorp—by one to whom his college career was as familiar as his part in the election. The allusions to it were horribly distorted, but they were perfectly open to the eyes of any one who had been contemporary with him at Cambridge.

Its abominable coarseness is a bar to the appearance of even an extract from it here. Indeed coarseness is a very mild term to apply to either its matter or its style.

"What in the name of everything detestable is this?" asked Hugh, as Mr White entered.

"Ah, you've read that, have you? I wish you could spot the author. He seems to be a Cambridge man."

"I hope not, for the sake of the University: and I certainly know of no one who could or would have written such a thing. Has Warden seen it?"

"I wish you did know him, though," answered the agent. "It is damned clever—devilish clever. We would try the same shop."

"I beg you will not think of any such thing."

"I don't know, Mr Lester. It seems to me—if you'll excuse me for saying so—that you have left us pretty much of late to ourselves. Now, if you leave the battle to us altogether, as you seem rather inclined to do, you must let us fight it in our own way. And this thing here is not a bad style of way, *I* think—and Warden thinks so too."

"So Warden is going to be away? Is it about our business?"

"I don't know, Mr Lester, and I didn't ask him," said the attorney, taking a pinch of snuff. "Sir, that friend of yours will be Lord Chancellor! He's a practical man, sir—and that's worth all your law ten times told."

CHAPTER XI.

IF Denethorp is a difficult place to arrive at, it is a still more difficult place to leave. Nevertheless it must be left at last, if only for a time.

The night of the day on which Hugh Lester had committed himself to his Armida was fine and warm, not only at Denethorp, but in London also. It was fine even in Fleet Street, and fine even in that thoroughfare which runs at the back of Farringdon Market and joins Fleet Street with Holborn.

And it had need to be fine in that narrow, crooked, evil-looking lane which, at all events in those days, knew no light save of the moon and stars: and they had barely room to shine. And yet there were, once upon a time, people who looked upon that dark and disreputable passage as the political centre of the world—as an institution to which Westminster itself had to yield the palm of influence. Nor were there wanting distinguished and even great men, who in-

creased their own influence by countenancing the notion.

The institution upon which its reputation in this respect was founded was a public-house with a large room at the back of it, which was nightly filled to overflowing.

Now on this particular evening the attendance was even more than usually large, although not more than usually distinguished. The dense clouds of rank smoke issuing from a quarter of a mile of clay, and mingled with the steam that arose from a barrel and a half of hot liquor, were not out of keeping with the style of the politicians who emitted the one and absorbed the other. There were tailors and cobblers from the north and from the east, brokers from Bell Yard, Irish students from Gray's Inn, some seedy-looking barristers from the Temple, bagmen from the City, medical men from nowhere in particular, and scribblers from, say, Grub Street, thinking themselves in all honesty to be Grattans and Burkes at the very least. Mingled with these were one or two persons who had made an excursion to the place, either out of curiosity or for some other special reason, and the inevitable one or two, seen in every public place in London, who have blundered in by mistake, and who never know either where

they are or what they are doing. But the general tone of the assemblage was that of *habitués*.

It is, however, not with one of the *habitués* that we have now to do: for among the strangers, sitting in a quiet corner and watching the proceedings with interest, was Mark Warden.

The subject of the debate was of course political: and much was said in the course of it about the Westminster election, with which all men's minds were then full. Sir Francis Burdett seemed to be the hero of the evening: and if one or two of his Majesty's Ministers could have heard half the epithets that were heaped upon their names whenever they were mentioned, they must either have been utterly overwhelmed on the spot, or have been rendered callous to abuse for ever.

It must not be supposed, however, that the speaking consisted of nothing but abuse. On the contrary, Warden was surprised to hear many pieces of real though turgid eloquence, especially on the part of the Irish element, and not a little good sense, put with practised skill. It was not, indeed, a highly intellectual or cultivated assembly, but it was neither an ignorant nor a stupid one: and the forms of debate were observed with a strictness and fairness that went far to compensate for much want of courtesy.

At last, however, there was a short pause in the proceedings, of which advantage was taken by a man who sat at the far end of the room to rise upon his legs quickly, but a little unsteadily. He was a big, burly fellow, with a heavy face, which, however, in spite of its far too plainly showing the signs of coarse self-indulgence, was neither without some pretension to good looks, nor, in spite of the apparent contradiction in terms, without some degree of refinement. His clothes were shabby in the extreme, and negligently put on—his linen was dingy and crumpled—he looked as though he were unfamiliar with the very idea of soap, and as though he used the bluntest of razors, and that but seldom: while his thick bushy head of hair was all rough and tumbled about as though, if he did condescend to keep a razor, he disdained even to borrow a comb. He was probably young in years, but it was difficult to say.

He was evidently well known there, for his rising was greeted with much hammering of glasses upon the tables. Meanwhile he only stood swaying himself clumsily about, and he continued to do so for a full minute after the applause had come to an end: but the company showed no sign of impatience, and at last he began to speak.

His first words were so thickly spoken as to be

inaudible, and a murmur of disappointment ran round the room.

"Sure and he's waited too lete, inthoirely," said one who sat next to Warden.

"But it's just too airly," said another. "The laddie's nae gude till he's fou."

"And do you call him sober now?" asked Warden.

"That just depends upon a' the ceerrcoomstaunces," his neighbour answered, guardedly.

But by this time the orator had found both his legs and his voice—a big, resonant, chest-voice, that left his large mouth without a taint of thickness or huskiness, and filled the whole place with its sound.

"Now we shall catch it 'ot and strong!" exclaimed another of Warden's neighbours, rubbing his hands with delight.

And, sure enough, they did. After a few words to say that he was going to support the popular side, he set himself to work to destroy all the arguments that had been urged in its favour, and to ridicule all who had used them. Then he told the house that it was to be supported on entirely other grounds: and, with extreme ingenuity, so twisted and distorted his opponents' arguments as to make them seem to be his own. He appeared to revel in

paradox, and in ridicule of everybody and everything. It was not a speech to convince, but it was really great art in its way, and, indeed, was not intended to convince. He was often interrupted, but woe be to those who interrupted him! for all that they got for their pains were personalities, from which they would rather have escaped free. To judge from the difficulty that he found in starting, he had evidently been drinking more than enough: but yet he had all the speeches of the speakers who had preceded him at his fingers' ends,—and not only their arguments, but their very words, and not only their very words, but their very tones. His own speech was not a magnificent specimen of real argument, but it was really a magnificent specimen of sophistry, of humour, and of sarcasm—even of eloquence: for he not seldom soared into true eloquence, especially towards the close. At the same time it must be said that, while but few of the speeches of the evening had been distinguished by refinement of style, his was full of points and allusions that render any report of it out of the question, and which were received with that sort of laughter with which such an audience receives what even such an audience is half ashamed to hear.

When he sat down he had succeeded in insult-

ing alike both friends and foes : and yet he was applauded by foes and friends alike with something more than the knocking of tumblers. Everybody had been made angry, and yet everybody was delighted that everybody else had been put down.

"There, mee jools—that's the thrue forrum, bedad, anyhow!" said the first of Warden's neighbours.

"It's vara weel — vara weel indeed," said the second.

"I sed as you'd get it 'ot!" said the Cockney, whose anticipation had been amply realised.

"Is he often here?" asked Warden.

"Ye'll nocht have hurrud um till noo?" was the Scot's idea of an answer—question for question.

Warden glanced at his watch. "Good-night, I must be going," he said to his neighbours generally : and then, having paid for what he had taken for the good of the house, picked his way among the tables to where the late orator was sitting in majestic repose.

"Barton!" he said.

"And who the devil——" was the other's polite answer, as he swung round brusquely.

"Don't you remember me? Warden of St Margaret's?"

"Warden of Mag's! By God! so you are. What'll you drink?"

"Nothing for me. I only came to see you."

"Well, here I am. Fire away."

"This is a queer place, isn't it? I have never seen the sort of thing before, so, having nothing else to do to-night, I thought I'd look in. And I have certainly been rewarded. I didn't know you were a second Demosthenes."

"Waiter!—another! No—two others: one for this gentleman."

"No—nothing more for me. I suppose this is all pretty well over? At least I don't care to stay. What are you going to do?"

"What—am—I—going—to do? How the devil should *I* know?"

"Then, if you don't know, come and have some supper with me. I'm at the ——."

Barton got up at once. "I'm your man," he said. "Have some bones and a bottle of port. We'll be Titans, and Port shall be our Pelion." And so, taking Warden's arm to steady himself, he half walked, half lurched, into the open air. He had not been asked for his reckoning: probably the landlord considered his company too valuable to run the risk of losing it.

It will probably have been conjectured that Warden's presence in Shoe Lane was not quite so accidental as it professed to be. He was not likely to have come from Denethorp to London just now for nothing. But, however this may be, he showed himself sufficiently hospitably disposed now that he was at his journey's end: for his companion and himself cannot very well be accounted congenial spirits.

Nor did his offer of hospitality appear to be unappreciated. Barton, as soon as the first effects of the open air had passed away, stalked, not staggered, along in a state of high good-humour, making the now half-empty streets ring with his heavy tread, his loud voice, and his still louder laugh. It is true that he talked rather to himself than to his companion, and without much heeding whether he was listened to or not: but still he was genial, after a fashion.

So they proceeded for some distance, arm in arm, when Warden stopped suddenly.

"Look there, Barton!" he exclaimed; "what is that?"

Barton placed his hand over his eyes, and looked towards the part of the sky to which the other had pointed.

"That? That is a fire," he answered. "Let's see it," and he hurried Warden along in the direction of the centre of the glow. Very soon they met with others hurrying in the same direction; and, before long, guided by the infallible instinct in such matters that belongs to a crowd, they found themselves in front of the —— Theatre.

Any one who, like Barton, had hurried there in order to witness a great spectacle, certainly found himself fully gratified. Over the whole block of buildings of which the theatre formed a part, soared up high into the air, even as it seemed to the sky itself, a vast unbroken sheet of flame that looked like a mirror of fire. The colour of the night, which was still fine and clear, was changed altogether from that produced by the mixture of white moonlight and the natural blackness of the streets into a uniform dull redness, far more unbearable to the sight than the direct blaze of such sunlight as those gloomy streets ever experienced even on a summer day. It was, in a word, one of those great fires which are the grandest sights of great cities: which alone afford to their inhabitants any idea of the sublimity of nature when her strength is for once set free from the weight of bricks with which they have crushed her down. In

this case the complete triumph of the flames had been the work of a few minutes only. The crowd that had hurriedly surrounded the doomed building could do nothing in the face of such a wall of heat and light — nothing but passively contemplate it with a sort of desperate admiration.

Barton in his excitement pressed close to the scene, dragging Warden with him. The avenue by which they approached the blaze was a narrow street which lay along that side of the house in which were the entrances to the gallery and stage. As on this side there were no windows through which any of the flames within might escape, so the effect which met their eyes was made up of a dense blackness surmounted by fire, in strong contrast with the red glow of the sky and of the opposite houses. The danger in case the wall should fall outwardly was great: and this, probably, according to the nature of crowds in general, was the reason why it was precisely here that the throng was thickest. The broad shoulders of Barton, and his complete carelessness about the shoulders of others, as well as for the abuse with which he was frequently assailed, but which he was well able to pay back in kind, soon forced a passage for himself and for his companion: and there they stood for some

minutes sharing in the dead silence around them, which was only broken by the hissing of the flame, and by occasional ejaculations of delight whenever the glow made a sudden leap upward. Fortunately the delight of the bystanders was prevented from being entirely complete by their disappointing knowledge that the house had been empty for some hours, and that consequently the lust of horror, which is one of the chief attributes of a crowd under such circumstances, was doomed to be ungratified.

Presently, however, it seemed as though Fate was for once about to bestow more than it had promised, and to provide a real tragedy after the spectacle.

Though no human lives were in immediate danger, the burning house, nevertheless, contained what was worth the while of many to risk life itself to save. Close by the stage-door, opposite to which Barton and his friend were standing, had gradually gathered together, among others immediately connected with the theatre, a group composed of some of the unfortunate members of the orchestra, whose only means of livelihood were being consumed almost before their eyes. For one with the income of a fiddler or trumpeter to lose his instrument is

much the same, in its consequences to him, as to lose his very hands—it means at least temporary ruin, and probably something worse than ruin, to himself and to those who are dependent upon him. But still, what was to be done? Who would be so rash as to plunge into that Phlegethon?

Suddenly Barton felt himself, in spite of his shoulders, thrust aside: and, turning round, saw a young man who, like himself, had contrived to reach the front, but, to judge from his appearance and figure, less by dint of strength than by force of energy and activity.

The new - comer, having reached the door, mounted upon one of the steps outside it, and then faced round quickly.

“Gentlemen!” he said, in a most un-English accent, but in a clear and ringing voice, “we lose the time. It has there not more than five minutes that the theatre burns itself: and it is possible that our instruments are not yet hurt. In five minutes one shall have them—me, at the least, I shall have the mine. *Suivez-moi!*”

And so, with the air of a captain calling upon his company to follow him into the breach, he ran straight through the stage-door.

Such an example is notoriously contagious: and

there were not more than one or two of his comrades that did not follow—possibly their instruments were safe at home. There were even one or two volunteers, amongst whom Barton was conspicuous. He had come for the whole spectacle: and he was apparently not one whom any instinct of self-preservation would restrain from seeing all of it that there was to be seen.

But there was also one who, without having anything at stake, and without being a volunteer, also accompanied the charge. Mark Warden, grasped by Barton and pushed from behind, had to enter the narrow and intricate passages of the house whether he would or no. And though he did not feel fear, he would certainly have preferred to be left outside. He would scarcely have cared to risk life for life: and much less did he care to risk it to satisfy unproductive curiosity, or to save somebody else's violin.

Not sharing, therefore, in the eagerness with which the rest ran forward, but rather drawing himself backwards from them as well as he could, he before long found himself alone in a labyrinth: nor, so sudden and rapid had been the process of his arrival there, was he able to regain the outer air without a guide. So he made up his mind, as the wisest thing he could do, to wait there quietly till the others

returned, seeing that, if he tried to extricate himself, he would probably only succeed in making matters still worse.

How long he waited there he did not know, but certainly a much shorter time than it seemed. But all of a sudden he became terribly aware that the passage in which he stood was beginning to fill rapidly with smoke: and he heard, instead of the returning feet of his companions, an ill-omened roar of voices outside.

In another moment his ears heard a worse sound still, and that not outside, but close at hand. It was as though the whole building had given an audible shudder, which passed through himself also. Lifting his eyes, he saw a fearful sign of doom indeed. The ceiling was cracking in long lines above him, through which rained a shower of sparks: and a tongue of fire, which at every beat of his pulse grew longer and wider, had licked its way through the cornice, and was writhing on and on towards him through the air.

The roaring of flame, the falling of beams, were now the only sounds he heard. The whole world seemed to have suddenly faded away, and to have left him alone with instant death.

Who may describe the terror, the despair, of a

moment when a lifetime of horror seems crushed into the space of the falling of a single grain of sand? It was not even as though a struggle for life was still possible. With his energy unimpaired he could do nothing but wait for the end, and pray that it might be soon.

And yet he did not lose his presence of mind. But that only made his utter powerlessness all the more terrible to bear. The most abject terror is nothing to what he has to undergo who retains his senses and his strength only to find in them additional instruments of torture.

Meanwhile the orchestra had been reached: those who could find them were already hurrying away with their instruments by another entrance—for the passage leading to the stage-door was no longer practicable—and in another instant the hand of the young musician who had led the way would have grasped the instrument for whose sake he had entered the house of fire, when Barton, who was close to him, suddenly exclaimed,—

“Good God! where is Warden?”

He heard the exclamation, and turned. A word or two, rapidly uttered, passed between him and Barton: and then at once, forgetting his violin, and in spite of the suffocating smoke-clouds that were

thick enough almost to destroy without the aid of flame, he dashed back through the perilous entrance from which his companions were now flying in confusion. Barton would have followed : but no sooner did he attempt to do so than his passage was barred by the sudden descent of a burning beam, so that he had perforce to make the best of his way out with the rest.

Warden had just given himself up for lost. His lungs were already more full of smoke than of air, and he could already feel upon his face the hot breath that glowed from the fiery tongue that had now come so near as almost to have broadened into a sheet of flame, when, borne in, as it seemed to him, upon a blazing cloud, stood before him the figure of the young musician.

"Quick !" cried out the latter in French, "quick—in another moment——"

Unaware of the risk that had been run by a stranger for his sake, thinking only, if he could be said to think at all, that it was to save himself that his guide had returned, Warden followed him into the street.

It was indeed only a moment that had lain between them both and certain death. There was barely time for them to regain the outside of the

house, when a crash, followed by a sympathetic cry from the crowd, told that the heavy roof had fallen in, and that all was over.

Then rode up a troop of the Life Guards: but, except for their adding to the effect of the scene by reflecting the red and white light of the flame from their helmets and cuirasses, they might just as well, for any good they found themselves able to do, have remained quietly in their barracks. Foot Guards, and volunteers in uniform, also mixed with the crowd: and, all too late, and yet as quickly as had been possible, came the galloping of fire-engines from all directions—just in time for their drivers to see and hear the terrible crash that told of the fall of the outer walls themselves. Then the flames, after a last leap upward, suddenly sank down into the crater thus formed, and the tragedy was wholly at an end.

For although not a single life had been lost, even by the falling of a brick or of a beam, it was nevertheless a real tragedy that had just been played: for the sudden destruction of a great theatre means worse than death to hundreds. Then the members of the company who happened to be present became able to think of their losses, the pickpockets of their gains, the respectable spectators of going home,

the rabble of beer, and the carpenters who had lost their tools and the musicians who had lost their instruments, of suicide.

"I wouldn't have lost that sight for a thousand pounds," said Barton, turning carelessly to the young musician who happened to be standing just behind him. "Damned lucky, though, that the walls fell in instead of out. It was within the turning of a brick that some of us never saw a theatre again, outside or in. *Sic me, non se, servavit.*"

On hearing himself addressed, the other started as from a dream.

"You call it lucky!" he exclaimed, in a tone of scorn that was as un-English as his accent.

Barton first stared, and then laughed good-humouredly. "Did you want a brick on your head, then? I didn't—at least not before supper. After that, perhaps——"

"Monsieur?"

"Ah, *vous ate oon frongçais? je asked—demandais vous si vous wanted, you know, oon brick soor voter tate?*"

"As well there as on——"

"As on what?"

"As on *that*—as on my violin."

"You belong to the orchestra, then?"

"I did, I suppose."

"Poor devil! then I'm damned sorry for you." He was perfectly sober now, and yet he spoke lightly. Nevertheless, as he spoke he thrust his hand into his breeches-pocket. But it came out empty.

"Curse it!" he exclaimed, "not a farthing. Why, I had ever so many shillings this morning—four at least. I say, Warden—do you carry a purse? Just lend me something or other."

Warden, who had now fairly recovered his composure, but was still ignorant of his obligations to his preserver from death, slowly drew out his purse and handed it to Barton, who held it out, without looking to see what it contained, to the unfortunate musician. "Never mind the fiddle," he said: "one's as good as another, I suppose."

But he to whom it was offered drew back, placed his hands behind his back, and bowed.

"*Je suis gentilhomme*," he said, with some dignity.

"A gentleman, are you? Then go and be damned for one," shouted Barton: and, taking Warden's arm, stalked off again.

"That burnt-out son of a fiddle calling himself a gentleman!" he said, as they continued their progress. "Why, I shall be calling myself one next—or even you, Warden."

His companion swallowed the impertinence silently, although he did not like it by any means. He also did not choose to notice that Barton had forgotten to return the purse.

They soon arrived at the hotel, which was not far from the scene of the fire: and the bones having been made bare and the port renewed, the latter recovered his temper.

"Barton," said Warden, after a short time, and without having made any allusion to their adventure, "I always knew you were the best of us all, and that those blockheads of dons didn't know a good man when they'd got him. But I had no idea you could do what you have been doing lately."

"Pooh! one must get one's liquor somewhere."

"Oh, I don't mean that—I mean something still better."

"And what's that?"

"It is really the best thing of the kind I ever saw—as good in its way as your trochaics on the Proctors. They were superb—I know them by heart still. But I almost think this beats them. I wish you had done it in Greek, though," he added with a smile, as he handed him a copy of the famous squib.

Barton took it, looked at it with one eye, seemed

puzzled for a minute, and then exploded into a roar of laughter, which he did not attempt to check.

"Oh, this?" he said at last. "I'm glad you like it, though! I was afraid it wasn't strong enough."

"It's quite strong enough, I assure you."

"Ha—ha—ha! Do you want it made stronger? I'll just add a line or two now, if you like. I feel in the humour. Look here——"

"Are you turned so venomous a radical, Barton?"

"I? Damme, no. What do I care for your politics and stuff? Tom Prescott's a devilish good fellow—ten times what you are, Warden: but I'd write like a Tory for sixpence."

"No, no, Barton, that won't do. A man can't do a thing like that twice in his life."

"I bet you I could, though."

"I would take your wager, if I were not sure you would lose."

"Come—what will you bet I don't do it?"

"A thing as good as this on the other side? Against Prescott himself?"

"Against the devil, if you like."

"Well then, I lay you ten guineas to half-a-crown, you can't write a squib on Prescott as good as this is."

"Done! Waiter! Pen—ink—paper."

"But surely you won't do it at once?"

"Just the time. Can't write in the morning—never could. Now or never. Damn it, though—just keep the ink-bottle steady. I must keep my finger on my left eyelid, I see—capital plan when the letters get mixed up. Here goes."

Pressing two fingers over his left eye, and swaying and nodding over the table—for he had by this time drunk more than enough to render any ordinary man incapable of doing anything—he dashed at the paper and wrote rapidly in a sprawling hand, laughing to himself from time to time with enjoyment of his own work. At the end of an hour or rather more, during which he had consumed the whole of another bottle of port, the task was done. He threw himself back triumphantly in his chair, upsetting the ink-bottle in the process, hurled the pen to the other end of the room, and tossed the paper, all smeared and blotted, but not quite illegible, to Warden. "There you are," he said. "That'll wash."

Warden read it over quietly: and then, without a word, handed two bank-notes to the author, who pocketed them forthwith, and then called out,—

"Waiter! a bottle of brandy! and now we'll make a night of it."

Alas for Warden! Before long he began to think that he had fallen into the clutches of a demon—that he had raised a fiend from whom he should never be able to free himself. The hour was already very late: but many other hours flew by, and still Barton sat there, drinking brandy, talking, quoting, spouting Greek, and boasting—all in a style which, though always coarse, was at first amusing and even witty, but very soon degenerated into such sheer, unutterable filth, devoid of either wit or humour, that even Warden, who was not particular, and who was not listening to him for the first time, was amazed. At last, sleepy and weary as he was, and almost overcome by the reaction that had followed upon his escape from such extreme danger as that in which he had been placed so short a time since, the disgusting monotony of his guest's talk became torture. If the man would but get drunk enough to be put into a hackney-coach and sent away! But no—the more he drank, the more he talked, the clearer grew his voice, and the steadier his hand, although, no doubt, he would have found it impossible to rise from his chair. Warden made as many hints as he could about his own fatigue: but he might as well have spoken to the bottle as to Barton. Nor did he dare to march off to bed,

for fear of what might happen: for the waiters had retired long ago. Five o'clock struck, and there sat Barton: six o'clock, and he sat there still: seven o'clock, and the house was stirring—but he seemed more immovable than ever. At last, without remembering how, Warden dropped asleep in his chair from sheer exhaustion: and when again he woke, the first thing he saw was Barton, curled up upon the hearth-rug, sleeping like a child.

"There's one comfort," he thought to himself, rather revengefully, as he took his way wearily to the Denethorp coach: "the beast must be killing himself—and not by inches."

CHAPTER XII.

EVERYBODY who is not of a purely lymphatic temperament must, during the course of the day, accumulate a certain amount of ill-temper, which has to be let out somehow or other. On the whole, the most pleasant people to deal with are those who let it evaporate as it comes, spreading it over every part of the day and over everybody with whom they come in contact—themselves, their friends, and strangers impartially; for the result is that their ill-temper is dealt out in such infinitesimal doses at a time as to annoy nobody very much. Others, again—and this is by no means a bad plan—reserve theirs for some particular period of the twenty-four hours, such as breakfast-time or the hour before dinner, when nothing that anybody says or does signifies anything to anybody. But there are some—and, unfortunately, these form the majority—who reserve theirs for particular people: who are

all that is delightful to the world at large, but who, at home, are bears or tigers. So common is this practice, that a person who is exceptionally genial in society, may safely be set down as one with whom it is not altogether pleasant to live. Now Angélique Lefort, like everybody else, had her annoyances, and, consequently, her passages of crossness: and as she was far too amiable a person to display these to the world, she was forced to let herself out either in solitude or among her slaves at home, when she happened to have them at hand. It is very doubtful if Hugh Lester would have continued to be quite so much in love had he had the command of a magic mirror for the rest of that day. It was mainly with Marie that she was put out for having interrupted her *tête-à-tête* at so exactly the wrong moment: but it was not so much upon her cousin that the avenging cloud settled as upon the rest of the household. The children were snubbed to their hearts' content, until Ernest settled down into sullenness and Fleurette into tears, and even the mild old father of the family found his coffee bitter. But as everything that their divine Angélique said or did was always necessarily right, she was only petted and sympathised with all the more—silently, that is, for no one dared to say a word

to her, except Ernest, who was not over-fond of his cousin, and who, in consequence, got as severe a reproof from Marie as she was capable of bestowing.

But, fortunately for her, the days of magic mirrors had long gone by, so that Hugh went his way with no image of her in his mind save such as she had afforded him in person.

After his interview with his agent was over, he went home to Earl's Dene, and, as was his habit, reported to his aunt and her guest all that he had learned of the progress of affairs in the town. But his heart was not in his story, for he had already obtained the triumph for which he cared the most. His real business now was to render to Miss Clare the explanation that was due to her as mistress of Earl's Dene from her heir and adopted son, and which he felt ought not to be delayed.

Nevertheless, manly as he was in all essential things, he could not but feel a little nervous about telling the old lady that there was to be an heiress to Earl's Dene as well as an heir—or, as he intended to put it to her, that she was to have a daughter as well as a son. He had all his life, like most of those about her, been a little afraid of her, in spite of his experience of her affection for him: and perhaps the

enormity of proposing to marry Miss Raymond's dependant seemed a little greater now, as a matter of confession, than it did when he was actually urging his suit.

Fortunately or unfortunately, however, according as it might have turned out, he could find no opportunity of telling her his story in the course of that evening: at least he thought he could find none, which is practically the same thing. While smoking his nightly cigar, however, he made up his mind that, come what come might, he would tell it the next morning: and he resolved, not out of deference to the advice of Mark Warden, but in order to compel himself to keep his resolution, that he would refrain from calling in Market Street until his story was told.

Next morning, then, he rose with a full intention of doing what was obviously right, and, when breakfast was over, was on the point of telling Miss Clare that he wished to speak with her, when she herself anticipated him by saying, when Miss Raymond had left the room,—

“Hugh, you know how I despise such things: but look at this that some man in the street was impudent enough to throw at me yesterday.” And she gave him the crumpled piece of paper that she had kept in her pocket.

He read the warning, and blushed to his hair.

"What is this, aunt?" he asked, angrily.

"That is just what I wanted to ask you," she answered. "One knows what things people write and say at elections, but this is such an extraordinary thing to say."

"And did any one dare——"

"I told you. It was thrown into the very carriage—into my very lap. Really people here seem to have lost all respect, all decency. And yet this could not have been done without some meaning or other. I suppose they have got hold of some story of your meeting Miss Lefort in the Lodge Park when you first came down."

"No, aunt: I do not think it is that."

"Just let me speak kindly to you, Hugh. It is not the first time that I shall have given you advice, nor, if you take it, will that be for the first time either. I am an old lady, you know, and may talk about such things: and, as you may have guessed, perhaps I have not always lived so much out of the world as I have since you have known me."

"My dear aunt, I——"

"Listen to me first, please. I can make all manner of allowances. This Miss Lefort is, I hear, a respectable girl. Now——"

"But, aunt——"

"Wait, please. Now—you know what I mean—I should be very sorry indeed to think that you, meaning no harm even, as I am sure you would not, had been putting any nonsensical ideas into the head of any young girl who is good and respectable. I do not ask you any questions——"

"But I assure you——"

"But I do wish to ask you—and now, of all times—not, by any conduct of yours, to give the people of the town occasion to speak ill of Earl's Dene. You are almost a Clare, you know, and should remember our motto. The French have a saying which to my mind is a very noble one, when rightly used, that '*Noblesse oblige*.' We, my dear Hugh, are in a position to set an example, not only of right conduct, but of conduct that should be without a suspicion of wrong. We must give up our amusements for the sake of our duties. You understand me, I know."

"Quite, aunt; but——"

"And just think for a moment. This girl is the sister of Miss Raymond's companion——"

"Cousin, aunt."

"Well, almost the sister—of Miss Raymond's servant, in fact. It cannot be decent that you

should give people occasion to say that you are on too intimate terms with her, no matter how contemptible may be those who say it. Besides, it is not fair, not kind, to the girl herself, to whom, in her position, character is everything: and people can only couple your name with hers in one way."

"Aunt——"

"That is all I wanted to say to you. And now I will destroy this wretched scrawl. Are you going into the town to-day?"

Now was the time to make a clean breast of it—now, if ever. It need scarcely be said, however, that Hugh did not take advantage of it.

In effect, he found it impossible. It was not only that Miss Clare was always a difficult person to talk to when she had got some fixed notion into her head: it was not only that she had, so far as she had been able, trained him in habits of passive obedience from his earliest boyhood. It was by no means these circumstances alone that scattered his resolutions of the night and of the morning. It was partly a higher feeling, partly a lower, than was founded upon any aspect of the relation in which he stood to his aunt that had closed his lips.

To begin with the lower. He somehow could not help feeling a little conscience-stricken in the

matter: and though a touch of conscience is by no means a proof that a man has done wrong, it is at any rate a proof of his not being satisfied that he has done right. Of course Miss Clare had obviously and utterly mistaken the true state of the case: she had mistaken not only his intentions, but the very person towards whom they were directed. Now the mistake about the person was not, in itself, of very much consequence: but if she had so strongly objected to the mere suspicion of a flirtation with one of the two cousins, what would she have had to say to the idea of marriage with either of them?

Now there is a theory about *mésalliances* which accounts for a great many things. No man ever feels much offence at the idea of another man's marrying beneath him: but when he hears of a lady running off with a groom, or being guilty of any similar escapade, he is both astonished and disgusted. In like manner, even as men are tolerant of each other's condescensions, and intolerant of those of women, women are not altogether intolerant of *mésalliances* on the part of their own sex, but bestow the weight of their disgust upon such social offences on the part of men, without considering the unfrequency of the one or the frequency of the other. In her young days, it may be remembered, she had

herself been just the person to marry beneath herself merely for the sake of doing something *outré* and heroic: but, full as she was of all manner of prejudices, the condescension of the heir of Earl's Dene to a Miss Lefort would have seemed the depth of degradation, whether he should descend by way of marriage or no, and she had, in the course of her conversation with him, showed what she thought about the matter as plainly as possible, though less perhaps by the mere words she used than by her manner of saying them. Of course, Hugh could not be expected to share her feelings in this matter, if only for the reason that she was a woman and he a man: yet still, although in addition to this he was full of youthful impulse and she already old, he deeply in love and she full of social pride, he could not help to some extent feeling, though unconsciously, that he had, after all, been doing something that a lady would instinctively feel to be wrong, and, as a gentleman, he was touched in conscience accordingly, though it might be ever so little.

But, as has been said, a higher sentiment had been also aiding to bring about his silence. He, too, fully admitted that *noblesse oblige*: and he, too, believed in the Clares almost as much as Miss Clare

herself could have desired. Not only so—not only did he accept the traditions of his family and of his class for gospel—but he was at heart a good fighter, although of late he had rather neglected the battle in which he was engaged. And now it was certainly not the time for him to make his own affairs a stumbling-block in the way of the victory for which his friends were striving. What he had to do for the present was to fight for victory, though but for their sakes, as though he still cared about it for his own. It was the country gentleman's principle of conduct—to do what was right in his own county, from repelling an invading army to sitting as a silent and superfluous member of his Court of Quarter Sessions, and to consider everything to be of importance that concerns the spot of earth in which God has placed him. The true importance of the Denethorp election was no doubt very small indeed, but he never thought so: and the serious and earnest pride of Miss Clare, though it did not affect his love for Angélique, yet made him remember that he had something to do, as he considered, for his country, and for the institutions in which he had been taught to believe. Now it was obvious enough that, under the circumstances, a confession to Miss Clare on the spot would be worse than inopportune:

and so it was that a little want of readiness and self-confidence, some difficulty in explaining himself, a long habit of respect and obedience, and a great deal of honourable unselfishness, all acting together at the same moment, caused him to hold his tongue.

"Shall you not then be going into the town?" repeated Miss Clare, seeing that he paused.

"No—I do not think I shall. I don't see how I can be wanted to-day. By the way, how splendidly Warden is working for us! White is full of him."

"So I hear, and so I can see too. It is satisfactory in these days to see a young man of promise who does not think it fine to be a radical." She paused, and sighed. "What shall you do with yourself, then? Ride with Alice?"

But this Hugh could not do. He needed to be alone after his discomfiture: he had to think how he should overcome his aunt's prejudices, and how he should act, when the election was over, if he should find them invincible.

"No," he said, "I have something to attend to here. I don't think I can."

And Miss Clare, as Alice returned to the room in her riding-habit, looked from one to the other, and sighed again.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE next morning Angélique rose with a heavy and anxious heart to hear, as she expected, of her lover's quarrel with his aunt, which, from what she knew of their respective characters, she judged to be inevitable. It was not only that she feared the consequent failure of her scheme: she feared also the loss of her situation with Miss Raymond—in short, that she would prove to have grasped at a shadow only to lose the solid meat. But the morning passed, and the afternoon, and still Hugh did not come. Had she been really in love with him, she could not have desired to see him more: and it was with a sinking of the heart that at last, towards evening, the servant put a note into her hand, directed in a handwriting which she guessed to be that of Hugh. A groom from Earl's Dene was waiting for an answer.

“A letter from Earl's Dene?” asked Marie.

"Only a note from Miss Raymond," she answered: "I have a book of hers that she wants returned. I must go and look for it. I know I have it somewhere among my things."

As soon as she reached her own room she tore the note open with a trembling hand.

"Dearest," she read, "I have not been able to speak to my aunt yet; nor, indeed, do I think I shall be able to till the election is over. She would be very excited to hear of it, so I had better wait till we have done with the contest. How I wish it was over, I need not say. I am longing to see you, and counting the hours till to-morrow, when I shall come to you whatever happens—before twelve if I can. I cannot believe in my happiness yet unless I see you—it is all like a dream.—H. L."

She both smiled and sighed with relief, and forgot all her anxiety in a moment.

"He is afraid of Miss Clare after all," she thought to herself. "He will *never* tell her now!"

So she took a pencil and scribbled her answer.

"My dear Hugh,—How strange it seems to begin so!—I have no doubt you will do all for the best, and doubt not all will be well. I can wait—I have trusted you with too much not to trust you altogether now!—A. L.

"Of course I will be in to-morrow morning."

This she carried to the man with her own hands, and she spent all the rest of the evening in a state of temper as angelic as her name.

"Did you find the book?" asked Marie.

"No—I could not find it. I suppose Miss Raymond must have got it herself without knowing it."

But though her own placidity was restored, the rest of the Lefort family had by no means so much reason to be satisfied with the state of things. The teaching work of the old Frenchman had lain principally among the families of the mills—that is to say, of the opposition: and ever since the beginning of the contest, he had found himself—why, he could not understand—looked upon coldly in all quarters. In many cases, even, his services were suddenly dispensed with. Now the number of French students was of course never too large in Denethorp: and though Monsieur Lefort enjoyed a monopoly of those that there were, a pupil more or less made a considerable difference to him. Even at the best of times he found it sufficiently difficult to get along respectably, and to pay his way. He was obliged to dress tolerably well: he had two young children to feed, and educate, and clothe: he had to support Marie, who could not be spared from the household

and the children to a farther extent than that of taking one or two very cheap pupils, whom she taught with Ernest and Fleurette: and the long illness of his wife had burdened him with many debts. Worst of all, he was far too mild and despondent a man to make a really good fight of it: and he was too blind to see what was going on even in his own family.

Among other places where he taught was a boarding-school, which has been mentioned already, and was kept by a lady whose respectability was of the extreme sort. It was patronised chiefly by the tradespeople of Denethorp and Redchester, and was the French master's best stronghold: for to learn French was there *de rigueur*, as much even as to learn the use of the globes. On this day he had been there to give his lessons as usual: but instead of being allowed, as usual, to go straight to the schoolroom, he was asked to speak with Mrs Price herself in her room of state. She was a strong-minded person, rather of the dragon type, like so many schoolmistresses of the old style: and she ruled her school as Miss Clare would have liked to rule Denethorp. Her notions of decorum and propriety were terribly strict: and, altogether, a private interview with her was rather a thing to be feared,

not only by her pupils, but by her teachers also. But the age, ugliness, respectability, and meekness of Monsieur had won her heart: and so she had generally left him pretty well alone.

But now she was stiff, even for her.

"Sit down, Mr Lefort."

He bowed and sat down.

"I think, Mr Lefort, you have now known me for some time?"

"I have had that happiness, madame."

"Very well. And you know the school, too?"

"I think so, by this time, madame."

"And you are acquainted with the character it bears?"

"That it is of the highest. Yes, madame."

"Character, Mr Lefort, is everything."

"Assuredly, madame."

"And do you feel justified, Mr Lefort, in coming here day after day, and week after week, to teach in a school whose character is such—is such—as you admit it to be?"

"Madame?"

"I say do you feel justified, Mr Lefort? That is the question."

"I do not understand, madame."

"I thought, Mr Lefort, that you were a respectable

man. In *you* I did *not* think myself deceived. But it is not that. I know what men are too well to be suprised at—at—anything. But you must be aware that as long as your family go on as they do, you are not a fit and proper person to be the instructor of young ladies of respectability."

Mr Lefort became stiff in his turn. "I must beg you to explain yourself, madame. What have you heard of my family?"

"Oh, you ask, do you?"

"Certainly, I ask."

"All the world knows it."

"And what does all the world know?"

"I blush for you, Mr Lefort! I blush for your grey hairs!"

"I am not conscious, madame, that I have any reason to blush for them."

"So much the worse—so much the worse, Mr Lefort."

"But this must be some slander. I will ask you——"

"Ask your daughter, sir—ask Miss Lefort, who is the talk of the whole town."

"*Mon Dieu!* Marie—the best girl in the whole world? For shame, madame."

"Yes, for shame, indeed! Ask her, as you pre-

tend you do not know! And you will please to consider our engagement at an end. I will pay you, of course, instead of the usual notice: and I owe you something besides, I believe. You will be good enough to let me have the account at once."

"A gentleman does not pretend, madame. Yes, I will ask Marie—not you any more, who accuse her, and will not say why: and I will not take your money—no, not a penny—not even when you apologise to her, as you will!"

He had some blood left in his dried-up veins, after all: and he dashed out of the room as if he had been younger by thirty years, leaving Mrs Price petrified and rather doubtful.

No doubt he did well to be angry, though not from a practical point of view, seeing that he had already anticipated the money that he had so scornfully refused. But he changed his mind about mentioning the matter to Marie: he could not bring himself to distress her, as indeed it seemed to insult her, by asking her what it all meant, and he had too much confidence in her to really suspect anything wrong. He would almost as soon have suspected Angélique herself. The calumny, whatever it might be, must, of course, be traced to its source at once, but not by means of her who was doubtless the most

ignorant of its existence. He did not even speak of his dismissal when he got home, but only said that he should not be at the school as usual the following morning. Meanwhile he considered to whom he should apply for advice.

One effect of his not going out the next day was that he spoiled the chance of anything like a *tête-à-tête* between his niece and Hugh, who came according to his promise. She just whispered to her lover that no one knew anything about their engagement as yet: a communication at which, in truth, he was more surprised than disappointed.

But he was fated to be still more surprised. He was about to leave, after a very short and unsatisfactory visit, when Monsieur Lefort said to him,—

“Mr Lester, should you think me very presuming if I ask your advice about something that concerns myself?”

“If I thought myself able to advise you in anything——”

“Then would you let me walk with you a few steps in your own direction?”

“I shall be delighted to have your company. I am in no hurry.”

As soon as they were in the street Monsieur Lefort told him of his interview with Mrs Price.

"I could not speak to her any more," he said, when he had finished his story, "and I could not distress Marie. What had I better do to find out what it means?"

Lester frowned angrily. "I am glad you did not mention it to Miss Lefort or to—to her cousin. I, too, have heard something of this. I am ashamed that the Denethorp people should be such idiots—for myself, I should not care a straw, but if you are to suffer it must be stopped at once. It is to injure me that these absurd stories are put about."

"You, Mr Lester?"

"Yes—in my election."

"But how——"

"I scarcely like to tell you, it seems so absurd. People pretend to have noticed that I am too much at your house."

"*Eh bien !* and what then?"

"They join my name with that of Miss Lefort, your daughter, it seems: and they have the pleasant and charitable idea about me that I can be after no good."

"Then, Mr Lester, you should have done one of two things. You should have told me, or discontinued your visits. You should have remembered the value of a girl's good name, when she has nothing else."

"Indeed you wrong me. How could I have done either, when it was only the day before yesterday that the report came to my own ears? And I have not been since."

"But you came to-day."

"Monsieur Lefort, let us understand each other. I did come to-day, but it was not to see your daughter."

"Was it, then, to tell me what you had heard?"

"It was not."

"What was it for, then?"

"It was to see your niece."

"What! Angélique?"

"Yes. I love her."

"*Grand Dieu!*"

"And I would make her my wife."

Monsieur Lefort was so utterly taken aback that he could not speak for many instants. At last he said,—

"And does she know it?"

"I have told her so, and she has given me hope."

"And when was this? How long has she known it?"

"She must have known it for long. But I did not tell her so till when I was last here."

"You have done wrong, Mr Lester—very wrong."

"I hope not."

"You have done very wrong. I know enough of English ways to know that."

"But I am my own master. I am serious in what I say. I mean rightly and honestly. In what have I done wrong?"

"That may all be very true. I do not doubt you mean well. But you should have thought a little of us, I think."

"Oh, what matters the chatter of a townful of malicious idiots?"

"Nothing to you, perhaps. But to us it means ruin."

"But when she is my wife? What can harm you then?"

"In a matter like this, Mr Lester, you will pardon me for speaking of your own affairs. You have made them mine also. I presume that Miss Clare does not know of this intention on your part."

"Not yet."

"So I thought. No. If you do not consider us, we must consider you. People would blame us with justice if we were the cause of your ruin."

"But if Angélique——"

"If Angélique is the good and brave girl I take her for, she will see it in the same light that I see it.

I will speak to her, and then she or I will write to you. In the meanwhile do me the favour of coming to see us no more. You cannot, with honour, condescend to us, nor we ascend to you. I daresay you will think I say hard things, but you will think better one day. And you must remember that I am old enough to be your father, and that I love Angélique as if I were hers."

"No: I cannot consent to that. I cannot give her up like this. If she loves me——"

"That can make no difference if she cannot be your wife."

"But surely Angélique can judge for herself."

"No doubt. But surely you would not have her judge blindly."

"But if she has decided already?"

"Mr Lester, this argument will prove endless. As a gentleman, I trust you will not come to us while, as you see, your visits are likely to do us a fatal injury. If you do, I shall be obliged to think of you badly, which I am far from doing now. And I should, in my own self-defence, feel it my duty to communicate with Miss Clare. Just think—it is a question now neither of you nor of Angélique, but of Marie."

Lester did think, and then said, frankly,—

"I will not give up Angélique. But I will give you my word not to call in Market Street until after the election is over, on condition that you will let me write once to Angélique to explain why. I might do so without your permission, I know: but I wish you to feel that you can trust me."

"And I do trust you. And you shall have an answer."

And so, upon this understanding, they parted, mutually dissatisfied.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN Monsieur Lefort returned home after this conversation, he felt terribly fatigued. His life was one of chronic, monotonous trouble, and the excitement of the last four-and-twenty hours had been too much for him. Little used to the occurrence of anything unusual, he found himself both physically and mentally incapable of speaking either to Marie or to Angélique of what was upon his mind : and so he drank his coffee in silence, wondering the while how long he should be able to afford himself his only luxury. Angélique was curious to know what had passed between her uncle and Hugh, but the silence of the former reassured her. After all, she had not much to fear from him—he was not Miss Clare. But still she liked things to go on without unpleasant scenes : and if she cared about anything, she cared for the good opinion of Marie.

She was, however, to a certain extent enlightened

as to the position of matters by a letter which she received from Hugh that very evening, and which her uncle handed to her in a deprecating sort of way. When she had read it she saw clearly that her best course would be to trust to fortune, seeing that she had secured her fish, and that she could rely upon Miss Clare's being kept in ignorance for the present. After all, if her uncle should make a fuss—and she had never yet known him do so about anything—she could manage him somehow; and from Marie she had nothing to fear but an "*Angélique!*"

And so the nomination of the member for Dene-thorp was brought nearer by another day. Warden had returned from London, and had slept off his fatigue; and Marie had something else to think about than the humours of her cousin. And so, on the whole, Angélique had no very great cause to be dissatisfied. Madam Clare could not live for ever, and then——

For his part, Hugh had, during the last day or two, been rather more attentive to his aunt's guest than usual: not by any means of set purpose, or with any intention of throwing dust in the eyes of anybody, but simply because he somehow felt that he had not of late paid her as much attention as mere politeness required—perhaps to some extent

also on the same principle that makes a schoolboy, who has been guilty of some great piece of mischief which he would rather not have found out, unnaturally well behaved in other respects. Not that Miss Raymond much cared. She liked him very much, but she was by no means perpetually thinking of love and marriage. When she rode, she rode to ride, and not to flirt. The interest which she took in the election itself arose from her being readily interested in everything that went on about her, and from its interesting her friends, and not from any special cause connected with the candidate himself. Nevertheless the dust did find its way into Miss Clare's eyes all the same.

But one day, on returning from a ride with Miss Raymond, which had been pleasant to her, and, in spite of his anxieties, not unpleasant to her cavalier, the latter was told that a gentleman was waiting in the library to see him, whose card bore the name of Lieut. Mountain, R.N.—a name that he recognised as that of a retired naval officer who lived at Redchester, and amused the evening of his days with local politics and agitation.

"I have the honour of addressing Mr Lester?" he asked, although he knew Hugh by sight perfectly.

"Pray sit down, Mr Mountain."

"I call, sir, as the friend of Mr Prescott."

"And may I ask what has obtained for me the honour of a communication from Mr Prescott?"

"I said as the friend—as the *friend*, sir—of Mr Prescott, who is, sir, as you may be aware, the popular candidate for the representation of this borough."

"I am certainly aware that he is a candidate, but whether he is the popular one——"

"Mr Prescott, sir, feels that he has cause to complain of your conduct towards himself personally."

"I should be sorry to think that. He does not expect me to retire from the contest, I suppose? For, except by opposing him, I do not know what reason I can have given him to complain."

"Sir, this is a most serious business, and I beg you will treat it seriously. Mr Prescott feels that you, by yourself or by your agents, have acted towards him in a way not becoming in one gentleman towards another."

"Sir!"

"You will understand, sir, that I desire to proceed in this affair with all courtesy. Perhaps, sir, you may not—I say you *may* not—be aware that

there has been published in this town an infamous libel."

"I am perfectly aware of that: but I should hardly have thought that Mr Prescott would have charged me with attacking my own friends."

"Am I to understand, sir, that you deny all knowledge of what I allude to?"

"You may understand that I don't understand a word you say."

"I allude to this, sir." And he produced a copy of Barton's last performance, which had been flying about the town all day, but had not as yet found its way to Earl's Dene.

Hugh read it.

"And does Mr Prescott mean to say that he can think me the author of a thing like this?"

"Mr Prescott, sir, has reason to believe that he knows who the author is, and he has excellent reason to believe that you know who it is as well as he. And he thinks, sir, that it is an infamous publication."

Hugh considered for a moment. "Could it be Warden himself?" he thought. It did not seem to be unlikely. But as he did not choose to guess—

"Well, it has been published now," he said, "and

can't be unpublished again. What does Mr Prescott expect me to do?"

"He demands an immediate apology, sir, for this slanderous and unjustifiable attack."

"An apology? How can I apologise for what I know nothing about? I am sorry it appeared, of course: but really I think that he is the very last person who ought to complain of it."

"An apology, sir, and an immediate suppression."

"He must know, Mr Mountain, and so must you, that suppression is impossible. And I have done nothing that will admit of an apology."

"Then, sir, do I understand that you refuse to apologise?"

"Most distinctly."

"On your own responsibility?"

"On my own responsibility—whatever that may mean."

"Are you aware, sir, that in that case there can be but one termination?"

"If Mr Prescott thinks I have wronged him, of course I am ready to give him proper satisfaction."

"Perhaps, sir, you had better consult some friend. I shall remain at the King's Head, Denethorp, and will give you two clear days to consider. If by

that time I hear from any friend of yours that you are still in the same mind, or if I do not hear from you at all, I will consider that the rest of this affair is to be arranged in the only way that will then be open to my principal."

"Will you take any refreshment, Mr Mountain?" He rose to ring the bell.

"Good-day, sir. And I trust you will think better of it by to-morrow."

And so, to add to his difficulties, he found himself engaged in a duel with the rival candidate. "So we may not have to go to the poll after all," he said to himself, and then wrote to an acquaintance of his at the Redchester Barracks, asking him to meet him the next day.

It will seem at first sight absurd enough that so apparently slight a matter should assume what would be held in these days so serious an aspect. The licence of an election excuses—or at least used to excuse—much hard and even foul hitting. But this case was exceptional, as might very easily indeed be proved were the effusions of Dick Barton fit to appear in type. There is a limit of insult beyond which a candidate for a borough, long-suffering as he must needs be, cannot be expected to stand; and Prescott was not only the reverse of

long-suffering, but it was just his sorest corns upon which Barton had deliberately trampled in such a manner that no man, at least in those times, could possibly let the matter pass without resenting it. On the other hand, though Lester entirely disapproved of Warden's proceeding, and was himself entirely innocent, he felt himself bound to support his friend through thick and thin, in respect of what had been done in his own service; and besides, he considered that Prescott was the last man who had any right to complain. At all events, he felt sure that his opponent, even if he had had any just reason for complaint, had not the faintest right to anything approaching an apology, and less even from Warden than from himself: and so he was more than ready to stand by the consequences of refusing to give one. And so, what with Prescott's very natural anger—seeing that he had been tricked and rendered ridiculous by means of his own weapons—and what with Hugh's chivalrous determination to bear upon his own shoulders the whole responsibility of a proceeding of which he entirely disapproved, only one termination of the quarrel was possible. Indeed, if the truth must be told, his chief feeling about the matter was one of vanity at being engaged in his first "affair."

The next day, Captain Seward—who, by the way, happened to be the last man in the world to counsel peace—conveyed Hugh's final answer to the King's Head: and a meeting was arranged to take place in a convenient meadow about half-way between Dene-thorp and Redchester.

The interval between a man's first challenge and its result is apt to pass very much as though it were part of a dream: and as such, at least in the case of Hugh Lester, it ought to be described. Nor is the dream altogether of an unpleasant kind, in spite of what sober-minded people may think, when one has hot blood in one's veins, and is convinced that it is the right and chivalrous thing to do. But hot blood is apt to grow feverish, and fevers have their chills. And though love by no means makes a man less inclined to fight, but rather the contrary, it does make a man less inclined to be killed.

He could not help regretting, as he walked about the place at night, on the eve of the meeting, his promise to Monsieur Lefort that he would not attempt to see Angélique, for now it was quite on the cards that he might see her no more—that he might have to leave the world without even bidding her farewell. In answer to his last letter, he had received the slightest and most clandestine-looking of notes, reas-

sureing him of her patience and trust in him : and upon this he had lived for many days. But now his soul required stronger meat than written words, which had been read and kissed until their sweetness had grown almost stale. And his desire was all the stronger, since it could not possibly be gratified. He had written five letters in case of accident—one, full of explanation and of gratitude, for Miss Clare : one to Warden, full of thanks and exhortations to fight the battle still upon his own account—making him in effect his political heir : one to an old college friend, full of kind remembrances to everybody : one to his servant, full of commissions : and one to Angélique, full of love. But this was but a sorry substitute for what he longed to say and do, after all : and his cigar tasted bitterly. Nevertheless he slept well, and in the morning was as cool and as well prepared as a man who thinks he is doing his duty should always be. In fact, the morning was always his best time.

An early hour had been fixed for the meeting, and he found Captain Seward waiting for him with a trap at the bend of the road beyond the bridge.

They drove off rapidly ; and the freshness of the air soon put Hugh into unforced spirits. They had not a very great way to go, and they found themselves the first on the ground.

Presently, however, from the opposite direction, came up another trap, containing Lieutenant Mountain, a surgeon from the barracks, and the great Mr Prescott himself.

Both the captain and the lieutenant were pretty well used to the business ; and as the last resort was now inevitable, the forms and ceremonies were got through quickly, and the two opponents were soon in their places, waiting for the signal to fire.

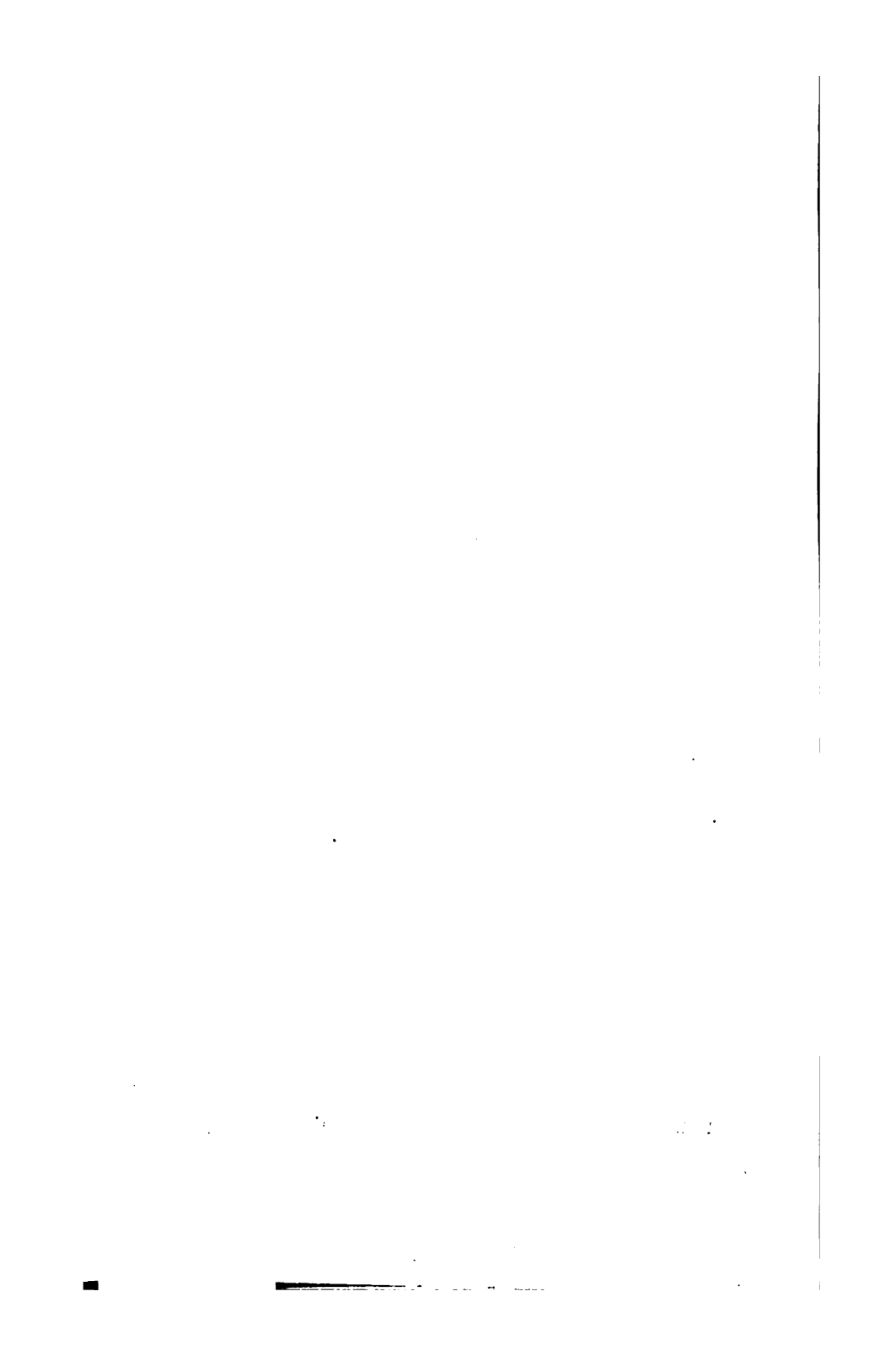
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BOOK II.—MARIE



CHAPTER I.

A MAN'S real birthday is not the day on which he first opens his eyes to the light of the sun. It is that on which the sunshine first pierces a little farther than his outward eyes.

At all events I like to say so, seeing that the latter, in my own case, is the only birthday that I am able to keep. For anything that I know to the contrary, I may be as old as the Great Pyramid, and have passed the first few thousand years of my life in a slumber from which I one day suddenly woke up to see—some clothes hung out to dry in a back garden.

Not a very striking introduction to the waking world. But what would you? Everybody must see something first: and it is not given to everybody to find their self-consciousness for the first time in a storm or in a battle. Of course, if I had my own way I would give my memory a more poetical origin:

but, as I have not my own way in the matter—indeed I have, in the course of my life, had it very seldom, except in my very earliest years, when I had it rather too much—I must be satisfied with facts, however unpoetical they may be. Besides, I might have done worse. These same clothes—petticoats and such things—were not, I remember, without their merit as a spectacle to untried eyes, whether in point of colour, or of the form bestowed upon them by the wind, as it shook them and puffed them out into the semblance of the wave-line of an angry sea: and I distinctly remember the rhythm of their flapping—an unmusical sound which, however, has been suggested to me a hundred times since by music in many cases as devoid of either body or soul as the clothes themselves, but which has often, for that very reason, affected me, not by any inherent suggestive power of its own, but by calling to mind a thousand other things.

Many a soulless sound has since—heaven knows why—by carrying my memory backwards over what is by this time a very long period of years, summoned up before me, in no ghost-like fashion, the undulations of familiar hills, the springiness of their turf, the whiteness of their winters, the sunshine of their summers—in a word, that strange, mysterious, magi-

cal odour that is at once suggested by the words, "my own country." I wonder whether it is given to those who, as I consider it, have the misfortune to be born in great cities, to really understand this feeling—whether the Parisian or the Londoner finds in the multitude and variety of his stench anything similar in effect? For my part I believe they do: and that, had I also been city born, the smell of many chimneys, for example, might bring as dear and as sadly pleasant associations to my heart as the special perfume of my own woods and hills. For, as the voice is to the man or woman, so is this subtle aroma of the past to places: and the voice of his mother sounds harshly to no man.

At least I suppose not: for in this matter I must confess myself personally ignorant. Even as in point of age I might, for aught I know, be the contemporary of the Pyramids, so, in point of parentage, I might be of no woman born.

Who my father was, however, I *do* know—at least I have been told. He was no other than the Marquis de Créville, who had been feudal lord of the place where, on the principle I have laid down, I consider myself to have been born: and I have also been told that I was, or rather should have been, in the bad old times, heir to his title and lands. As

things actually were, however, I found myself heir to nothing but to his name and to his principles, which, I am proud to say, seem to have been those of no marquis of the old *régime*, but of a citizen of France—of one who is the willing subject of no royal accident. Such also am I, Félix Créville, Frenchman and musician: such, in spite of much sorrow—ay, and worse than sorrow because of it—I have always been proud to be: and such I am content to remain, until a few more years lead me at last, as I hope they will, to join that mother in heaven whom on earth I have so ignorantly loved.

Amen. But to return to the clothes-line period, now so long ago, and yet still so near.

Childish recollections are strange things—strange in their very monotony: for, in spite of circumstantial differences, those of most men are pitched pretty nearly in the same key. The colour that the universe assumes to the eyes of one young child is always much the same as that which it assumes to those of another, however much the form may vary. Whenever I have, in the course of conversation upon this subject, happened to compare notes with people of any sort or kind or country, high or low, rich or poor, I have always found that there is as much essential community of experience in this respect as

in respect of dreams, even although almost every one, as in the case of dreams, tries to make out his own to have been something singular and abnormal. At any rate, I can safely say, for my own part, that I have never even found in books any account of childish experiences—of course I do not mean in point of outward detail—with which I have not been able to sympathise personally: and I know that in this I am very far from standing alone. Indeed I firmly believe that this would prove to be universally the case were it not that so many people forget the childhood of their minds and of their souls altogether. To remember one's past self as one really was, and as one is no longer, requires a faculty that is far from being universal: for it requires the faculty which, when joined with a power of expression, makes the poet. Without going so far as to claim for myself that title, I do hope that I may claim to call myself something of an artist in my own line, which comes to much the same thing: and, if I am at all an artist, I feel that it is because I am still the same Félix who was once, according to my system of autobiographical chronology, five minutes old.

Thus my own country, my old home, and the effect that they produced upon me by developing me into what I am, are still a part of my present self. Still

but, as I have not my own way in the matter—indeed I have, in the course of my life, had it very seldom, except in my very earliest years, when I had it rather too much—I must be satisfied with facts, however unpoetical they may be. Besides, I might have done worse. These same clothes—petticoats and such things—were not, I remember, without their merit as a spectacle to untried eyes, whether in point of colour, or of the form bestowed upon them by the wind, as it shook them and puffed them out into the semblance of the wave-line of an angry sea: and I distinctly remember the rhythm of their flapping—an unmusical sound which, however, has been suggested to me a hundred times since by music in many cases as devoid of either body or soul as the clothes themselves, but which has often, for that very reason, affected me, not by any inherent suggestive power of its own, but by calling to mind a thousand other things.

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truduced me to a music that is almost more to me than that of nature herself. I have thought, sometimes, of composing a *fantasia* on the subject of that fellow and his tunes, only no one could be expected to appreciate it but myself, and for me it would be too sad a task now. If, however, I ever do any such thing, I shall call it "Pré-aux-Fleurs," and tell no one why.

I remember, also, that I was looked upon in the village as a sort of superior being, if only for my father's sake. No one ever once scolded me, that I can remember, under any circumstances: and I am sure that if I was ever guilty of the weakness of crying for the moon, as I have no doubt I was, it was not the fault of my friends that it did not become mine. Every one, I fear, spoiled me, and "*Grand'mère*" most of all: and I believe that to this very day I might have gone on living upon the charity of the place, thinking it quite right and quite in the natural order of things, had it not been for the Curé and the fiddler. The former taught me to read and write, to decline *Musa*, to be a good Catholic, and to remember that, peasant as I had become, I was a French gentleman after all—a fact that, in spite of my republicanism, I was, and am not, unwilling to remember. The latter, who was called

Jean-Baptiste, taught me to play the air of the *Marseillaise*—which I infinitely preferred to *Musa*—to sing a song or two, and to keep time to one or two lively dances. Nearly half my time I spent with the one teacher, and nearly half with the other: and though I know whose company I then most preferred, it would be difficult for me to say upon which of the two I look back with most affection now.

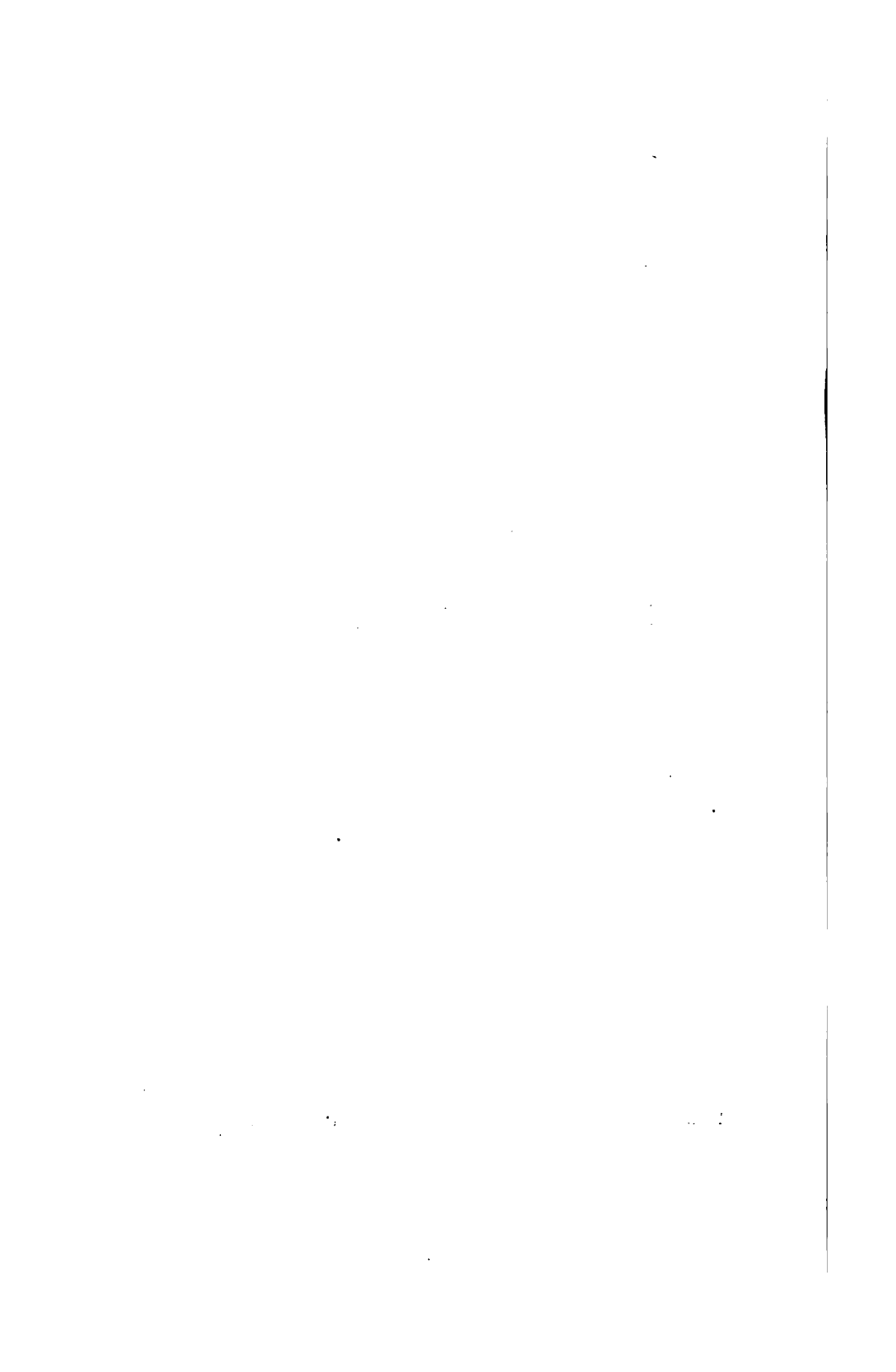
Nevertheless, in spite of the education that in one way and another I managed to pick up, it naturally required some external circumstance of a very decided nature to prevent my settling down in some way or other as a peasant of Saint Félix-des-Rochers—for so was the parish named. It is true that the conscription might have turned me into a soldier of the Empire. But otherwise I should very likely have married one of my playmates—I think I know which it would have been—and settled down into the proprietorship of a *chdlet*: while my violin would have succeeded that of Jean-Baptiste as the enlivener of weddings and festivals. I believe, too, that in my ignorance of all external life I should have been happy. But I do not, cannot, regret that such was not to be my lot: for who would give up his experience even of sorrow?

CHAPTER I.

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striking introduction to the waking world would you? Everybody must see that it is not given to everybody to be wakened up for the first time in a pleasant way. Of course, if I had my own way I should have had a more poetical origin:



Presently, however, from the opposite direction, came up another trap, containing Lieutenant Mountain, a surgeon from the barracks, and the great Mr Prescott himself.

Both the captain and the lieutenant were pretty well used to the business ; and as the last resort was now inevitable, the forms and ceremonies were got through quickly, and the two opponents were soon in their places, waiting for the signal to fire.

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tired of rambling: so it was the most natural thing in the world that I should sit down by the roadside where I found myself, and amuse myself quietly in my favourite fashion with Loup for my audience—or rather not quietly, for he always howled most delightfully whenever I played certain passages that he seemed to find sympathetic.

I was so interested in this occupation that two strangers approached without my observing them, until I suddenly heard a loud burst of laughter within a few feet of where I was sitting.

Now it was not so rare as it had once been for strangers to be seen in the neighbourhood during the summer: for the picturesque had of late years begun to come into fashion, and it was no rare thing for artists and other tourists to find their way among us from Besançon, and the other towns in the same part of France. From my own small experience I could see that these two were tourists of one sort or another amusing themselves by walking through our beautiful hills instead of posting along the dusty highroad.

"*Bravissimi!*" exclaimed one of them—a tall, dark, and handsome man of about fifty years old, with bright black eyes. "That dog will be an acquisition to the *grand opéra*."

BOOK II.—MARIE

VOL. I.

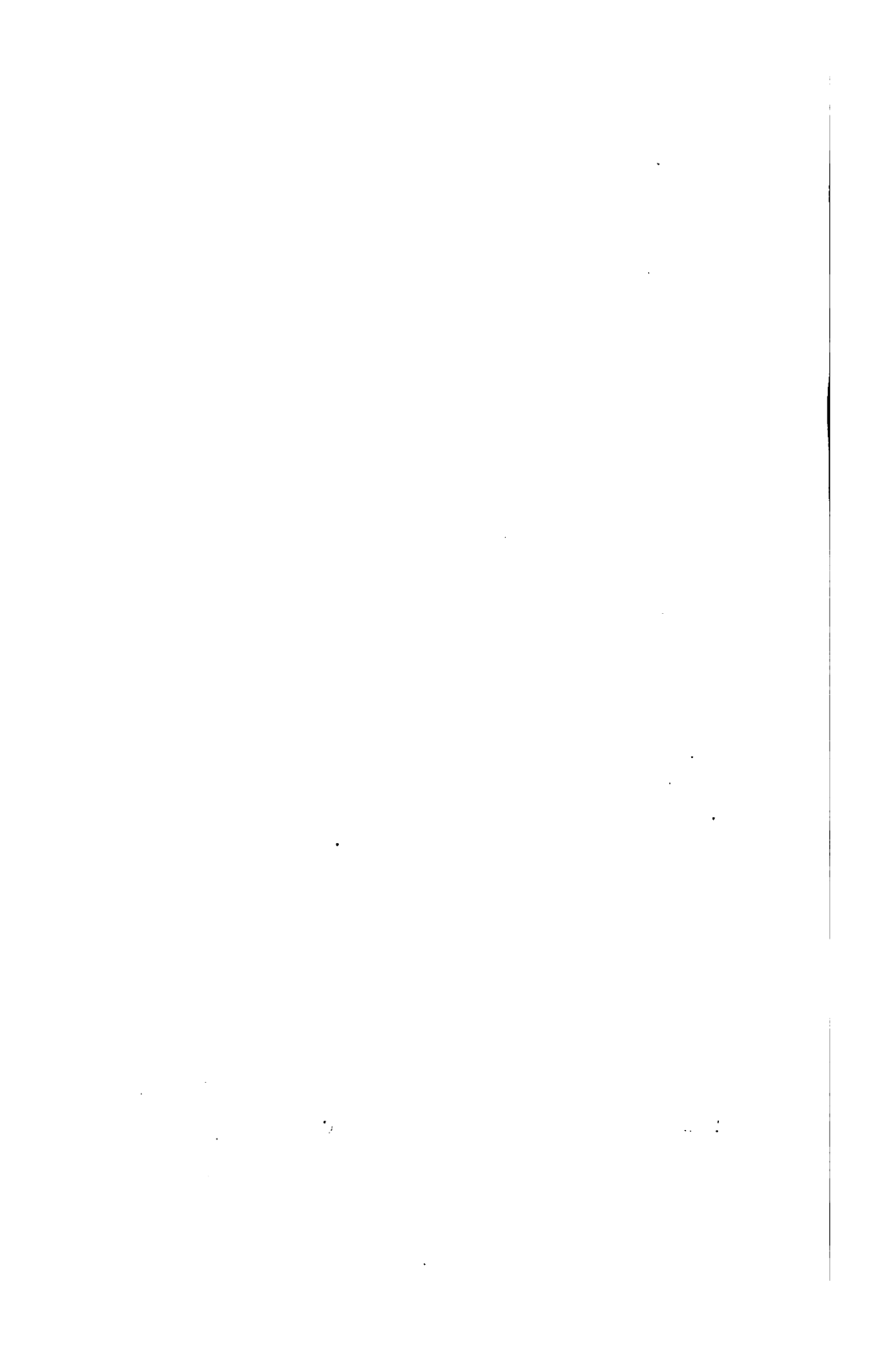
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At all events I like to say so, seeing that the latter, in my own case, is the only birthday that I am able to keep. For anything that I know to the contrary, I may be as old as the Great Pyramid, and have passed the first few thousand years of my life in a slumber from which I one day suddenly woke up to see—some clothes hung out to dry in a back garden.

Not a very striking introduction to the waking world. But what would you? Everybody must see something first: and it is not given to everybody to find their self-consciousness for the first time in a storm or in a battle. Of course, if I had my own way I would give my memory a more poetical origin:



cal odour that is at once suggested by the words, "my own country." I wonder whether it is given to those who, as I consider it, have the misfortune to be born in great cities, to really understand this feeling — whether the Parisian or the Londoner finds in the multitude and variety of his stench anything similar in effect? For my part I believe they do: and that, had I also been city born, the smell of many chimneys, for example, might bring as dear and as sadly pleasant associations to my heart as the special perfume of my own woods and hills. For, as the voice is to the man or woman, so is this subtle aroma of the past to places: and the voice of his mother sounds harshly to no man.

At least I suppose not: for in this matter I must confess myself personally ignorant. Even as in point of age I might, for aught I know, be the contemporary of the Pyramids, so, in point of parentage, I might be of no woman born.

Who my father was, however, I *do* know—at least I have been told. He was no other than the Marquis de Créville, who had been feudal lord of the place where, on the principle I have laid down, I consider myself to have been born: and I have also been told that I was, or rather should have been, in the bad old times, heir to his title and lands. As



tired of rambling: so it was the most natural thing in the world that I should sit down by the roadside where I found myself, and amuse myself quietly in my favourite fashion with Loup for my audience—or rather not quietly, for he always howled most delightfully whenever I played certain passages that he seemed to find sympathetic.

I was so interested in this occupation that two strangers approached without my observing them, until I suddenly heard a loud burst of laughter within a few feet of where I was sitting.

Now it was not so rare as it had once been for strangers to be seen in the neighbourhood during the summer: for the picturesque had of late years begun to come into fashion, and it was no rare thing for artists and other tourists to find their way among us from Besançon, and the other towns in the same part of France. From my own small experience I could see that these two were tourists of one sort or another amusing themselves by walking through our beautiful hills instead of posting along the dusty highroad.

"*Bravissimi!*" exclaimed one of them—a tall, dark, and handsome man of about fifty years old, with bright black eyes. "That dog will be an acquisition to the *grand opéra*."

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His companion, some fifteen or twenty years younger, and of a short, stout figure, was one whose hair, eyes, lips, and peculiar turn and carriage of the shoulders—that only infallible sign—marked him out as one of the house of Israel.

“Too many of them there already,” he answered, “and of both sexes. This one certainly wouldn’t be the worst of them, though. But we seem to have come upon a brother artist, besides the singer. Just play that again, my boy, will you?”

I was much too spoiled a boy to be shy, and so I stood up and played willingly and at once. But Loup was not shy either, and spoiled the effect considerably.

“Do you never play anything but accompaniments for *Maestro Lugubrioso* there?” asked the short man again.

“*Platt-il, M’sieur?*”

“I mean, does your dog always howl like that?”

“No, *M’sieur*—only at what he likes.”

“Then play us something that he doesn’t like, please.”

I obeyed.

“Well done, my boy. But that isn’t quite the right way, though,” he continued: and then, taking

my violin from me, and having put the strings in order, he *did* play.

After all, then, I had never heard music before!

"Oh, play something more, *M'sieur* — please!" I exclaimed, excitedly, when it was over.

He smiled, and then began something else. I felt the hills floating away before my eyes into infinite space. Who could this man be? and to think that my own poor fiddle should be capable of producing such sounds as these!

At last that also came to an end, and with the cadence my soul seemed to sink away also. I could not have spoken to save my life, and stood spell-bound.

"And who taught you to play, my boy?" asked this wonderful being.

"Who taught you, *M'sieur*?"

"Ha, ha, ha! You seem a strange fellow. If you wish to know, it was a certain stupid fellow they call Moretti."

"And where does he live?"

"Where does he live? In a place called Rome, if you know where that is. But why do you ask?"

"Because I will go to Rome!"

The two strangers first stared at me, then at one another, and then laughed again. I felt angry.

"I suppose, *M'sieur*," I said, "if he has taught you he can teach me too."

"Hm! That depends, my boy."

The tall man now addressed me for the first time; and he spoke gravely and kindly. "Play me something else," he said: "something slower, if you can."

"Pardon me, *M'sieur*."

"Why not?"

"Because I will never play again until I have learned."

"That is to say you will never go into the water until you have learned to swim? So be it, then—never mind. What is your name? Do you belong to this place? Is this how you get your living?"

"Félix Créville, *M'sieur*. I live at Pré-aux-Fleurs—there up the hill."

"And do you get your living by your fiddle?"

"No, *M'sieur*. I live with Aunt Cathon and *Mère* Suzanne."

"And can you read?"

"Yes, *M'sieur*."

"And write?"

"Yes, *M'sieur*."

"*Bravo!* You are a fine fellow. Have you a father—a mother?"

"I never had either, *M'sieur*."

"You must have come into the world somehow, though. And how old are you?"

"I do not know, *M'sieur*."

"Ah, I see. And so you want to learn the violin?"

"I *will* learn it, *M'sieur*."

"That remains to be seen. How have you managed, so far?"

"I have not learned, *M'sieur*."

"How? You did not find it out by yourself, I suppose?"

"Ah, *M'sieur*! I know nothing. That is not playing."

Poor Jean-Baptiste!

"Well, so be it. And do you think Aunt Cathon or *Mère* Suzanne could find us a draught of milk at Pré-aux-Fleurs?"

"Oh, *M'sieur*!" I had hopes of more of that wonderful music from the stout violinist, who had been silent while the other was talking to me.

"Show us the way then," continued the tall stranger. "What shall you do with this franc-piece?"

"I shall give it to Jean-Baptiste!"

"And who is Jean-Baptiste?"

"He gave me this violin. He taught me—what he knew."

"Ah! Give it him then, by all means; and this also," he added, increasing his gift. "He must be a clever fellow, this Jean-Baptiste, and we will see him too, as well as Aunt Cathon and *Mère* Suzanne. And now we must be acquainted. This is my friend, Monsieur Prosper: I am Signor Moretti."

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.







